LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

# THE LATINAS' INTERNET: MEANINGS AND PRACTICES IN THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF DISADVANTAGED MIGRANT WOMEN IN LONDON

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS OF THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.
LONDON, MARCH 2014

# ABSTRACT

This thesis is an invitation to investigate social issues in times when technologies are a social construction that is very much taken for granted. Who is in front of the screen and what it means to individuals can be easily overlooked, particularly when the subject is migrant women, part of a minority. When people shape and appropriate a technology the relationship is not unidirectional; their interpretations and practices also forge their transnational experiences as there are no standardised migrant experiences, nor standardised uses of technology. Hence it is crucial to problematise the users and to deconstruct the social and cultural context of their appropriations. Therefore by challenging domestication theory and applying it to users who are part of a transnational arena, with this thesis I investigate which concepts and rationale of this approach are useful for deconstructing the role of technologies in the lives of migrant women. The questions that guide this thesis are how the internet gains a place and a meaning by being appropriated in a transnational home, and how this influences women's daily experiences. The theoretical contribution is firstly to bring together notions of internet appropriation in everyday life with those of the transnational literature and migration, and furthermore to contribute by tackling aspects of digital inclusion and how disadvantaged populations appropriate technologies from a cultural standpoint, highlighting the relevance of their condition as migrants with transnational links. Therefore I provide an ethnographic account of migrant Latinas in vulnerable conditions in London, and their internet experiences, by following a qualitative methodology that incorporates in-depth interviews with thirty-seven women and participant observation in two community centres as well as five participants' households. The main conclusion is that although their levels of digital engagement and degrees of technological expertise were dissimilar, the internet was present in all their discourses and had an important role in their migrant situation, either by enabling them to continue their consumption practices and communications, and/or by empowering them to be part of this technological stream for the first time. Notwithstanding that there is not just one aspect which is responsible for how they construct their internet, their migration status and vulnerabilities enriched the approach by contributing to depicting their everyday, social and cultural context. Therefore the properties these women perceived were strongly connected with their current needs and interests as immigrants in a marginalisation stream. From a theoretical standpoint the main gap in understanding migrants' domestication of technologies was the scant attention paid to both their cultural appropriation and the nuances of their hybrid context, as well as to spaces of belonging and digital location going beyond geographical limits. This was pivotal in the creation of cultural meanings, and of the context within which the technologies were (re)appropriated.

# DECLARATION

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I expected the PhD to be a lonely process where I would be isolated and completely on my own. Yet it ended up as the reason why so many bright and inspiring people came into my life. There were so many generous people without whom this research would have not been possible. Firstly, the women who took part in this research: I am so grateful for the trust they placed in me, sharing their stories so openly, and also for admitting me into the intimacy of their homes and lives. I also need to thank Casa Latina and the Indoamerican Refugees Migrant Organisation (IRMO) for opening the doors of their centres to me so that I could conduct this research.

Next, the Media Department of LSE was the best possible place to engage in this academic adventure. There I had the honour to work with Professor Sonia Livingstone, who guided the beginning of this project and offered valuable comments and feedback to help me to find my path and my own voice. Professor Robin Mansell was also there from my early days as a Masters student. Her always-wise academic advice and support helped me not only to start the program but also to find the strength to continue with it. I also had a brilliant second supervisor in Dr. Myria Georgiou. Her work was a source of enormous inspiration and I learnt so much from her and from the impressive literature she has produced. Her enthusiasm for taking part in this project is something for which I will always be indebted. Finally and most importantly, this thesis could not have been completed without the guidance of my main supervisor, Dr. Ellen Helsper, whom I deeply admire and respect. If I had the courage to get to the finishing line it is because of her. She was a mentor who was there for every step, large or small. The reason why I engaged with the role of the internet in the lives of vulnerable people in the first place was because of the amazing work she does. Her research, her work ethic and her unique commitment completely changed my understanding of what an academic should aim for.

On this journey I not only encountered those great minds but also great friends and colleagues who illuminated even my darkest days: Dr. Sally Broughton-Micova, Rahoul Masrani, Gemma Martinez, Arturo Arriagada and Rafal Zaborowsky. Likewise Natasha Andreicheva and Masaki Zaborowsky were two of those who made me feel at home. Special mention to my "London family", Monica Gerber and Tito Elgueta, without whom all those years abroad would have been impossible to bear. In Chile, my parents, Ricardo and María Teresa, and my siblings, Claudio and Verónica, were there for me even before the dream to study abroad came true. Matías, my adored son, also joined me on the journey. All of them helped me to remain sane and happy despite the turbulences of being a working mother writing a PhD thesis. Yet most of the credit belongs to Jorge Betzhold, my beloved husband, devoted friend and the most loyal companion I could never dream to have deserved. You are the one that convinced me that moving to London to study was a good idea, the one that encourage me to pursue this PhD, the one that read every single piece of paper I dared to write, the one that waited for me outside the dodgiest places in London while I was conducting interviews and observations. This thesis is for you.

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# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

*"As every day, today I saw [on Facebook] pictures of my family, I felt nostalgic and happy at the same time. There were pictures of my parents and sisters. At some point I felt the need to be with them and hug them, to tell them how much I love and miss them. It's interesting because with technology you experience several emotions: sadness, happiness, fear, awesomeness, because just through the computer you can see from a funny blooper to a very important news report, or receive free classes in whatever you want to learn"* (Fabiola, 31, Bolivian).

Fabiola arrived in the UK almost six years ago. She has been struggling with a difficult economic and family situation that nonetheless has not broken her determination to succeed in a foreign land. She wanted her son to be exposed to opportunities unimaginable for him in La Paz, such as growing up in a developed city and being fluent in English. However, her everyday life presented some challenges. To begin with, despite the time she has spent in the UK, she has never been on a language course and therefore she is not proficient in English, which limits the kind of jobs she can apply for, the kind of people she is able to talk to - even the kind of media she is able to understand. Fabiola also experienced problems with her visa and hence has not been back to Bolivia since she left, and has no option to visit. Her legal status also prevents her from changing her job as a cleaner where she works every day of the week. Yet Fabiola has a willingness to keep going despite adversity and has found some opportunities for fuelling this online. There she connects through social networking sites with family and friends back home. Her favourite activity is to post pictures of her family: she said she had at least 300 online. She started doing this recently after her daughter taught her. She is also learning how to access a local online Bolivian radio station, in order to hear familiar songs. It is in this context that the internet gains meaning and a role in her everyday life, overall impacting her experience of living overseas. The combination of these environmental factors, her willingness to learn to use the net and how she actually uses it creates an interesting empirical situation for an internet researcher to ask questions about the role of technologies in the daily life of immigrants, and moreover, how social and digital inclusion intersect in the midst of migration, marginalisation and transnational links.

When starting this project the main objective was to challenge the idea of technology as a sort of solution to problems caused by social exclusion. My starting point was the concept of digital

inclusion and the nuances of the process in a population that, according to the literature, was left behind in technological terms. Then I focused the study on how and why a particular group of immigrant women - adults, Latinas, vulnerable - interpret the internet, i.e., what are the affordances they perceive from the technology that lead them to their own construction of it, and to explore how these interpretations provide the basis or not for any 'improvement' in their precarious situation. This is based on a constructivist perspective of the technology, which I will detail shortly. Then, in order to find answers to my initial questions there were several aspects that needed to be taken into account, such as their practices with and around the technology, their discourses and expectations, as well their different experiences with the internet. Nonetheless, as several scholars have claimed, these interpretations should be analysed in the light of their current context, which is constituted by - but not limited to - their everyday life (Bakardjieva 2005, 2006; Berker et al 2004; Haddon and Silverstone, 1996; Haddon 2004; Georgiou, 2006). When looking into this aspect I realised that they were more than vulnerable people appropriating a technology: they were immigrants who were fighting to maintain transnational relationships, struggling to understand their surroundings, eager to consume cultural goods that made sense to them, that were in their language and that shared their cultural codes, among other features.

Therefore the main research question I will answer is how, in these vulnerable circumstances of migration, Latinas construct their own internet, and how this can be explained theoretically: mainly by domestication literature, with the help of migration and transnational literatures. Empirically, I ask how and why they engage in being active internet users and what it means for them in their particular social, cultural and financial context. Furthermore, I explore how this context shapes their internet construction and usage. To find answers to these enquiries I conducted explorative qualitative research, by interviewing in depth thirty-seven first generation adult migrant Latinas in London. I also conducted participant observations –though sometimes limited - in five households, and more extensive observations in two community centres in London where computers and internet classes were offered to Latinos.

The main theoretical contribution of this research is to address domestication by incorporating insights from migration and transnationalism literature, which enhance my understanding of the composition of the everyday lives of participants. Furthermore, it sheds new lights on the social and cultural aspects that are part of their context and that inform their technological appropriation. I also further the development of the redomestication concept, which enabled me to address the nuances of internet use in a migration context, and also to point out the different technological points of departure and trajectories of the Latinas that took part on this research. This was also an opportunity to problematise the concept of users and their domestication

processes, which start before purchase, and which are fed by social discourses and expectations. Empirically, I have addressed the different shades of technological appropriation in a context of migration and vulnerability. Despite the social, cultural and economic hardship that participants faced, they can be described as empowered users who, through the use of technology, encountered spaces of learning and leisure, as well as meanings of communication and cultural consumption that somehow improved their transnational connections and, overall, their migration experiences. I was also able to address the particularities of domestication within a cohort that could be defined as being in the same vulnerable condition. By applying the concepts of domestication and redomestication, I could draw on the technological characteristics of their paths and the differences between them when encountering the internet in a new environment. Furthermore, by looking at the social and cultural aspects of their everyday experiences I could better address domestication, as a theory that not only looks at technological aspects of the appropriation of devices but also takes a more holistic social approach. Overall this project contributes to increasing the scarce qualitative research done on migrant Latinas in London. Methodologically, this ethnography speaks of the challenges and the advantages of conducting research such as this when addressing internet use in intimate spaces as well as more public ones. The participant observations and interviews can also serve as an example of the importance of embracing the context of users, going beyond aspects of their use of technology by incorporating broader contexts, aims and needs into their migration experiences.

## 1.1 The theoretical journey of internet meanings

The theoretical starting point is, above all, a media and technology one. Artefacts' meanings are intertwined with practices and social arrangements (Boczkowski and Lievrouw, 2008, p. 955). This is the basis for how technologies acquire a role in the everyday life of people. Yet this "everyday" is not generic, neither the devices nor the users: far from it. Consequently when discussing "technologies" we are also discussing "people" and its nuances, and further specificity is required to grasp technologies' role. In this thesis I undertake the task by portraying women born and raised in Latin America who, in adult life, decided to migrate to Europe and eventually to London. They are from different countries, with different life stories and from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Nonetheless due their current employment, English illiteracy and financial situations they are all part of a cohort that can be described as "disadvantaged". My focus and interests lie in meanings and practices surrounding the use of the internet by these Latinas in London, and are inspired by the beginnings of the theory, when Silverstone and colleagues (1990) recognised technology beyond the object and in terms of consumption practices that gave rise to culturally constructed meanings (p.46). These meanings

are neither random nor the same across users, and the how and why, rooted in the heart of the practice, deserve a closer look. Although it may be assumed that structural data such as gender, age, class and education can provide some clues, what happens on the other side of the screen has remained part of an unknown terrain as a result of the lack of empirical data on migrant populations' internet use (Borkert, Cingolani and Premazzi, 2009).

As Lievrouw and Livingstone (2006) point out, "technology, action and social context are inseparable phenomena, each influencing the other" (p.4). Therefore, to try to answer the question of what the internet is for this group of Latinas and how it is constructed, I will follow an holistic approach that tackles to different extents the elements of meanings, practices and sociocultural context, and the nature of their digital engagements. My aim and inspiration is to respond to Silverstone's (2005) call for researchers to dive into the experiential arena where ICTs are appropriated, to understand what they actually mean and how they are embraced by disadvantaged populations, taking into account people's cultural roots and contexts. To address how the internet acquires meaning in an everyday-life setting an ethnographic eye and a theory that grasps these nuances are required. Domestication offers a user-centred approach, where technologies are seen as objects as well as practices and meanings and explores how people convert them into familiar objects that become part of their private cultural spaces (Silverstone, Morley, Dahlberg, and Livingstone, 1990; Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992; Silverstone and Haddon, 1996). It moves from cognitive issues to the symbolical and practical, pointing out people's culture, routines and practices and how ICTs fit into these (Sørensen, Aune and Hatling, 2000), and also highlighting the complexities and contradictions of the process (Laughey, 2007).

People's agency is also taken into account, as there is a negotiation before technologies become part of the household (Berker, Hartmann, Punie and Ward, 2006). This approach sheds light on the agency of users and opens the 'black box' of consumption by seeing people as "agents of technological change" (Boczkowski and Lievrouw, 2008, p. 961). This is a key aspect of the theory, which I will highlight by combining it with the concept of affordances, drawn from Social Construction of Technology (SCOT). Although this is a theory concerning the development of technology, it embraces the value of local practices and subjectivity in everyday life (Bijker, 2001; Boczkowski and Lievrouw, 2008). It tackles how societal power relations forge technological developments; therefore ICTs are born in contingency and human choices (Bakardjieva, 2005; Winner, 1993). A valuable insight from this is that technology can be interpreted in different ways according to the user's social circumstances (Klein and Kleinman, 2002). This view supports technology as a social construction embedded in a structure, and therefore is open to interpretations, although its focus is on the moment when technologies are

designed and developed (Winner, 1993). The contribution of affordances is that not all objects offer the same range of possibilities to everyone (Hutchby, 2001). Hence interpretations are rooted in participants' environments and characteristics. This is crucial to understanding how the participants in this study engaged with the internet. Moreover, it is important to include their condition as migrants and disadvantaged into the analysis, since it is their own sense-making which should prevail.

In the case of these Latinas in London there are a couple of points in particular that need to be addressed. First, this perspective tends to assume a *new* user facing a *new* technology, a scenario that nowadays may perhaps be naïve or incomplete. The spread of the internet in modern society, in terms not only of access but also of visibility, makes it increasingly unlikely that people will not have some familiarity with it - even those considered non-users or who resist technologies. Then the process of acquisition and meaning-making deserves to be looked at closely and analysed in the light of this scenario. Second, what happens with the domestication of the internet once the context changes. From a theoretical perspective the theory is an open invitation to research use of ICTs after a migration process, as it is assumed that there is no closure to the distribution of meaning and practice (Lie and Sørensen, 1996). Some scholars have pointed to redomestication, which has loosely addressed changes in the needs, routines and/or persons involved (1996). Although this concept has not received much attention from scholars, the changes in users' environments and how these affect their adoption and use of technologies has not been completely ignored in domestication literature. Haddon (2004) makes a thorough revision of early British research, as well as more recent French and German research, looking at aspects such as changes in work, leisure options, financial situations and family circumstances, among others. He concludes that these situations lead to different routines and needs, altering patterns of use of telephones and computers, and the overall role of ICTs in everyday. These findings show that technologies are in close interplay with the social context, and that ICTs are shaped in relation to user's environment. They cannot be separated, and to understand how people appropriate any technology a panoramic view of their context is needed. Furthermore, they demonstrate that in the majority of the cases devices became crucial throughout these new contexts: for example, to maintain and feed social networks in the case of unemployment (Haddon, 2004). How technologies' role changes but also somehow helps to navigate these new circumstances is something I am interested in, particularly in the case of migration, when the entire social surroundings, as well as the social position of the individual, have changed.This is the case of some of my participants, for example women with trajectories that have taken them from successful professionals to a situation as immigrants working as cleaners and struggling economically, where it is possible to presume that the role and the domestication of the internet need to be reassessed. The theory also suggests that, within the

domestication process, both user and technology are immersed in a dialectic of change (Silverstone, 2006) where technologies "leave their mark" (Silverstone et al., 1990, p. 50). Hence the exploration of how internet appropriation is imprinted on the migrants' experiences is one of the loose ends of the theory that I aim to pursue.

Theoretically speaking, I start from a domestication and social constructivist position that prevents me from generalising the internet and the experiences that surround it as standard. This is why I conceptualise how this group perceives and uses this technology as "the Latinas' internet". Empirically, as an ethnographer, observing the life of these women gave me enough evidence to agree that the internet is a far from given device (Hine, 2000; Miller and Slater, 2000). On the contrary, it is a construction, made up of aspects such as the nuances of their daily experiences as migrant women, their hopes and expectations, what they interpret as opportunities, the disadvantages they live with and the difficulties they expect to overcome. Therefore, studying the meaning of the internet for Latinas in these particular conditions is an exciting task because it enables us slip into the experiential side of how it is articulated and valued. Yet as technologies are malleable there is a chance that, as Bakardjieva (2005) graphically pointed out, they could be "experienced as an organic part of oneself, or, on the contrary, as a poorly made prosthesis" (p. 191). Hence, I am interested in how the technology is handled under these circumstances, its possibilities and what this means for their lives. One inspiration for my research has been to pursue how these women make sense of the device; how they appropriate it and incorporate it into their hectic routines; how they accommodate it in an already overcrowded house, representing their main access to loved ones who are thousands of kilometres away, to media in their own language, or to news of a missed foreign land: these were some of the questions I had in mind when starting on this journey.

Having said that, there is still a part of these Latinas' experiences that needs to be addressed to tackle the complexities of their everyday context. One is their migrant condition and how their senses of belonging are challenged by geographical locations (Georgiou, 2006, 2013; Bailey, 2007). Their cultural identities and boundaries, as well as their community of reference, are no longer where they reside (Hiller and Franz, 2004). They are part of a group that, as Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999) describe, are expected to "live dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and making a living through continuous regular contact across national borders" (p. 3). This refers to transnationalism where relationships are intensified despite distances in a common yet virtual landscape (Vertovec, 2009, p. 3). It sheds new light on migrants' repertoires of practices such as contact with distant family, correspondence and remittances (2009). New technologies play a crucial role in enhancing these transnational networks and reinforcing these social configurations (2009). Notwithstanding that not all

migrants engage in the same way with these technologies, these are some of the aspects that inform their context, as well as the pressures they are exposed to and their expectations. It is also an invitation to reflect on how transnationalism has changed the migrant landscape, particularly the potentialities of the technology, in their experiences as foreigners. This is a view that enriches questions about cultural appropriation as well as the difficulties and advantages of being a "connected immigrant" (Diminescu, 2008). Hereby I acknowledge the complexity of the task, which reflects the density of a context where not just the locations, but also the roles both of people and of technologies are changing. This is also an invitation to domestication theory to engage in dialogue with other streams of literature that pin down the nuances of the migration process and the transnationalisation of the household

This is an interesting discussion because when analysing how transnational migrants in deprived conditions appropriate technologies, there are elements of their environments that become relevant: for example, extension of the boundaries of the home, notions of mobility and displaced senses of belonging. I will argue that in this case domestication, although a useful approach, needs to be combined with theories that address these issues and enrich the nuances of an examination of the Latinas' internet. However, combining this framework with other theoretical perspectives is not entirely new. On the contrary, as Haddon (2006a) points out, there are other forms or levels of analysis that can provide useful insights. He gives examples of previous work that combines domestication with social construction of childhood (James and Prout, 1997), Bourdieau's social and cultural capitals (Hynes and Rommes 2005), and Voloshinov's language perspective (Bakardjieva, 2005). Each of these examples provides useful approaches that enable researchers to go beyond technological consumption perspectives and dive into the social and cultural context of users to understand their options, perceptions, expectations and challenges. Of these examples the one that inspires me the most is Bakardjieva's approach to the particularities of users, which she explores through the concept of 'little behaviour genres' (p.26). She focuses both on the material as well as social aspect of internet use, acknowledging the importance of getting to know the user, a premise that – as is the case for this thesis - leads her to a detailed empirical investigation. In her study she is interested in the ordinary user; in my research I am looking at the vulnerable user, the one for whom the everyday is a constant challenge and for whom technological adoption and use is not an obvious or an option taken for granted. Nonetheless we both locate this user within an everyday that holds part of the answer about the role of the internet in their experiences. Theoretically, Bakardjieva dives into different perspectives within cultural studies, understanding domestication as an on-going production process: uses, meanings and contents are created through technology use. Similarly to language, these types of uses are bounded to codes and rules, but are also open to new interpretations:

> The meanings that different social groups assign to a technology emanate from these emergent use genres rather than from dictionary definitions or through abstract reflections (…). Conceptually, the notion of use genre becomes a helpful stepping stone for overcoming the duality between the technical and the social (Bakardjieva 2005, p.31).

This notion, as well as the previous work cited, shows how scholars have reflected on the internet as a technology that takes form depending on the nature of people's lives, their previous experiences – technological and otherwise - as well as their current circumstances. Though this could be explored from a variety of perspectives, there are three aspects that I wish to highlight from Bakardjieva's work. First, her appreciation that there are different kinds of users, and looking beyond early adopters to the commonplace ones who were not in the minds of those who designed the devices. Secondly, how she recognises their agency through the combination of use-genres, as well as potential creation of new ones. Finally, her attention to context, namely the everyday and its particularities, providing the basis for ethnographic accounts. This is a perspective I agree with, particularly in a transnational context and when looking at users whose condition is that of migrants, but also who carry with them past technological experience that helps to shape their internet interpretations and practices. Hence aspects of migration and transnational literature would provide a solid framework within which to unfold the Latinas' internet. Returning to the early concept of the meaning of technology as culturally constructed through local practices (Silverstone et al., 1990), I aim to deconstruct these practices and to analyse them from a cultural perspective. A focus on various aspects of their experience - as women, mothers, Latinas, immigrants - provides a way to understand how this informs their construction of the internet, as well as how this construction interacts with their experiences as Latina women in London. I will also argue that these practices shape technologies, but I will go one step further to claim that, through the use of technology, practices are also shaped by and ultimately shape the user's migration experience. My intention is to provide insights that enable an analysis that incorporates both cultural and transnational aspects of appropriation. Therefore one of my theoretical contributions is to combine domestication with a migration-transnationalism perspective, and to critically discuss the elements of theory in this context. Within this framework cultural aspects of migrants' internet appropriation will gain relevance in the analysis, and therefore more attention can be given to an appropriation that is based on the roots of users, as well as to their contexts as foreigners. It also acknowledges the value of cultural interpretations and identities, in the process of giving meanings to technologies. These elements enhance their identification and sense of belonging to a community through

boundaries that differentiate them, and that take account of their history and ancestry (Buckingham, 2008; Hall, 2003).

### *1.1.1 Technological expectations and digital engagement*

Therefore I will go one step further and argue that these technological interpretations and practices also provide room for a digital engagement. In most of the literature on ICTs, engagement appears as a peripheral concept, usually synonymous with usage and participation (Anderson and Tracey, 2001; Cushman and Klecun, 2006; Selwyn, Gorard and Furlong, 2005; Selwyn 2006). Different measurements are included, for example quality of access, level of skills and people's own considerations (Hargittai 2002; DiMaggio, Hargittai, Celeste and Shafer, 2004; Helsper, 2008, 2011). However, engagement as a concept offers another layer that goes beyond this, and implies "becoming involved" and attracted (Oxford University Press, 2000). This involvement is a process that encompasses the interpretation and appropriation of the technology, which confirms how far I depart here from assumptions of linear and general adoption. This is similar to the definition, proposed by Mehra, Merkel and Bishop (2004), of a process where "internet use becomes part of people's daily practices and the way that it is tied to their sense of self" (p. 786). Therefore people's resources, motivations, social networks and contexts shape their own construction of the technologies and their engagement with them. Thus engagement forces researchers to look beyond participation in or use of technologies, to how people make sense of them, enabling a construction of the internet in a subjective, dynamic and sometimes blurry social context. With this I am not aiming to propose a new definition of engagement, but rather to explore the appropriation of technologies while giving careful consideration to elements of people's environments and their cultural characteristics that affect how they develop an involvement not only with the artefact, but also with the content and possibilities it provides.

The internet has been marketed as one of the cheapest and fastest ready-available technologies, presenting users with endless possibilities. However, this is not how some of my participants described it, since for some of them it is still a major investment and involves skills that they have not yet fully developed. These opposing views demonstrate the danger of taking users for granted instead of problematising them. Mahler (2001) warned of this more than a decade ago when conducting research into how separated spouses in El Salvador and the United States maintained contact. The author strongly believes that assumptions should not be made about communication among migrants, but that, on the contrary, questions about how it is accomplished should be part of the research repertoire (p. 585). Communication practices, as

well as other online practices, access and usage of technologies, should be analysed as distinct units in the light of previous findings, but also valuing their uniqueness. For example, Mahler (2001) dives into the world of letters. Among the findings, she points out how, even with written correspondence, there were several barriers that immigrants needed to overcome, such as infrastructure in the home village, and literacy issues necessitating adults asking children to write letters for them. There were a series of consequences in terms of the content of the letters as well as of the adults' authority. Some of these difficulties were similar to some faced by internet users, such as lack of digital literacy and the abundance of tech-savvy children who are part of many families' realities. These are some of the aspects, beyond the assumptions of use, connectivity and worldwide availability, to be taken into account when considering interpretation and practices of online experiences.

Additionally, when looking into users in challenging situations, their environment and non-technological aspects of it should also be part of the study and of the deconstruction of practices, since this provides valuable information. Therefore I would like to briefly present some aspects of the socio-economically disadvantaged condition faced by the population of the study, which was a relevant and very present aspect of their everyday context. Although, as I will develop later, not all participants have been always part of a cohort with these characteristics, the following aspects were common within their current migration experiences. Through the exposition of the more general aspects of the financial vulnerabilities they endured I also aim to situate this study in terms of class reference.

As the latest studies have shown, the lack of employment is a hardship faced by many Latinos in the UK, rising to 85% in London; moreover 47% of those employed are in elementary occupations (McIlwaine 2011, p.102). In this research the latter was very much the case as they were all employed in manual, low-paid jobs, such as cleaning. This meant that they usually needed more than one job and that the long shifts involved early and unsocial hours. Furthermore, it has been established that Latinos typically face a decline in their occupational status (2011) which was also part of the reality of some of the professional Latinas that took part on this research. Overall, their job status had a direct impact on the quality of their accommodation, which is also something that is commonly experienced by migrants Latinos, particularly in London. Researchers have described it as substandard, precarious and overcrowded (Bailey and Giralt, 2011; McIlwaine, 2011) and what I encountered in fieldwork subscribed to these labels, which were a constant remainder of the low quality of living and economic burdens the participants experienced. This added to the great distances and the long and expensive commuting required between their jobs and their households, which also had an impact on their social relationships and their ability to create and maintain social networks. Poor

access to healthcare was also part of the reality of my participants, which was fuelled in some cases by their illegal status preventing them attending public hospitals. Furthermore, in the majority of cases, women expressed a feeling of embarrassment due to their lack of English skills, and avoided as much as possible situations where they would have to speak with people in English, even though this sometimes endangered their health. On the other hand others conditioned these visits on the availability of a translator, limiting considerably their options to attend. Jobs, healthcare and any circumstance of public assistance were highly problematic due to this problem of literacy and the few opportunities they had to improve it (McIlwaine, 2011). These aspects of their living conditions were what shaped their experiences in London, but also their experiences with technological devices, where these were assessed under a new light.

Assumptions are also particularly risky when studying how those who struggle economically and are not part of the mainstream of society appropriate new technologies. Usually minorities and migrants are considered part of this group (Anthias, 2001; Berthoud, Modood and Smith, 1997; Healey, 2006) and they are therefore target populations for digital inclusion initiatives (Communities and Local Government, 2008; FreshMinds, 2007; Ofcom, 2008; SEEDA, 2007; UK Online Centres, 2008). Despite the extensive discussion about the level of effectiveness and the outcomes of these programmes, the key point is that technology is considered as one type of tool for achieving social inclusion, perhaps the missing link that could reintegrate these groups into the workforce and into society (Mehra et al, 2004). However this view is rooted in deterministic technological discourses assuming a linear and, to some extent, automatic correspondence between internet usage and improvements in quality of life and ultimately in position within society (Chen and Wellman, 2003; Green and Haddon, 2009; Thomas and Wyatt, 2000).

As previously discussed, from a constructivist standpoint, technologies provide room for agency, choices and contradictions (Lie and Sørensen, 1996; Sørensen, 1994). Then there is room for different interpretations, leaving behind assumptions that new technologies produce social change in a simple and deterministic manner (Berker et al., 2006; Leaning, 2005). Extremes are also risky, and technological determinism is as much to be avoided as social determinism, since this view considers technologies as neutral tools and the product of social demands, dismissing the politics and power structures embedded in them (Selwyn and Gorard, 2002). Thus, using a social constructivist approach to study the internet provides room to bring social issues into the discussion and to consider how the two streams interact: it is through its use that people reshape technology, and technology in turn shapes social and technical decisions (Carroll, Howard, Vetere, Peck and Murphy, 2001). The underlying assumption – the one that opens the door to a new research path – is, then, that there are no linear or deterministic

developments, but rather contingencies, nuances and contradictions which also permeate the interpretation and appropriation of technology (Carroll et al., 2001; Sørensen, 1994).

Findings in my research also allow me to contribute to this particular point. Some participants had a low level of education that prevented them fully developing digital competence, which, in combination with a deprived environment and social networks were usage of ICTs is not widespread, may have had adverse impacts on their earlier experiences (DiMaggio et al 2004; Murdock and Golding, 2004; Warschauer, 2004; van Dijk, 2006). From a digital inclusion point of view, these are barriers that increase the urgency to foster their online abilities so that they can manipulate and take advantage of technologies. Nonetheless these are also antecedents that enrich the understanding of their engagement once they encounter technologies, and it could be expected that some of aspects of their life would improve after internet domestication. Nonetheless in reality this is not necessarily the case, as technology can help them in many ways but they would still have no say in the quality of the jobs and accommodation they can access or their legal status, and, as my findings reveal, there would be very little impact on their English skills. These are just some of the contradictions that I faced when analysing my findings in the light of literature on internet use in disadvantaged populations, and their position in societies (van Dijk 2005, 2006). The internet as a construction is a view that helps to navigate some of these contradictions between the expected outcomes of technological appropriation and aspects of quality of life. This is because these women experienced the internet as a tool that helped them to cope with some of the hardship they were facing. Those who were for the first time embracing new technologies also gained a sense of achievement and expressed being very proud of their technological accomplishments, no matter how modest these were. Though anxieties and insecurities were part of their domestication process, they anyway encountered on the internet a source of relief for some of the everyday burdens encountered. Those more technologically competent participants who were redomesticating the technology also shared this, and they were able to find ontological security through the continuity of some of the practices that were commonplace for them prior to immigration. In other words, participants found in their construction and appropriation of the internet a tool to maintain practices and transnational ties, to gain information, and to some extent to 'translate' the world where they were living. Yet these were not necessarily aspects that directly touched their socio-economic status or concrete aspects of their quality of living and immigration status.

### *1.1.2 Clarification of concepts*

To address phenomena from the social world is a fascinating journey; however, one of the obstacles that I face as a researcher is to clearly delimit the object of study. As I am focusing on

the role of the internet in the everyday life of migrant Latinas in London, there are several concepts and elements that form part of the picture that helps me to explain its domestication process. Although my interest is to focus in the Latinas' technological journey, there are approaches other than from a technological perspective that I use through this research, although I am not in a position to discuss all of them in depth. Therefore in this subsection I will briefly present some of the key concepts that help me to assess the role of the internet in the life of these women, and from what theoretical position I am using them in the analysis.

### *Latinas*

When defining the population of the study, I was looking for a group that shared cultural characteristics such as language, certain codes to interpret the world and common roots, among others. These can be found in those that share a similar background: being born and raised in a similar country, where the majority of their families and friends are from, such as those that are from Latin American countries. This is highlighted in stories of women that migrate as adults, as they have a long story of cultural experiences in their countries of origin, and it is those experience that will help them to face the challenges posed by living in a new and very different cultural environment. Therefore, when reflecting on my population of study as 'Latinas', I was looking for a loose, common positioning that would help to interpret the world, and that would be based on their roots and cultural understandings. However, to label them according to cultural and geographical characteristics it is not unproblematic. On the contrary, as Bailey (2007) eloquently states, Latin America is indeed a diverse geographical region with a multitude of identities, and this richness and complexity is brushed out when the differences between countries - in stories, languages, culture, political systems and other areas - are not acknowledged. Bailey addresses this issue from a cultural identity perspective:

> This proposition suggests that it is not possible to think of Latin American identities as fixed and essentialised outside relations of power but rather as engaged in a dynamic and constant process of negotiation of identities-in-making with emphasis on the subject's agency. This highlights the complexities of social identities, the relationship between individuals and the contexts they live in, the way they conceive and symbolize the world, and the structural positions and cultural histories that shape peoples' history. (Bailey, 2013, p.72)

In fact the local circumstances where this Latino aspect is performed shape how it is perceived and experienced, as it means different things to be a Latino in London rather than a Latino in Latin America. One of my challenges, then, when looking at the role of the internet in a migrant population, is to capture this diverse Latino essence and how it developed in an already vastly

multicultural city. Keeping this in mind, I also need to acknowledge that to consider myself as a Latina and to identify myself as such enabled me to reach my participants. To belong to a similar place geographically, to share the language, to share certain cultural codes among the multitude of people and nationalities that populate London, put me one step ahead when recruiting women for this research. The fact that participants identified themselves as Latinas also showed me that this was their strategy to differentiate themselves from others – particularly the British. It was also a signal that helped them to recognise each other. They usually described themselves as Latina rather than as being from a particular country, as they were able to bond and leave behind the particularities and common rivalries of each country. Their roots and cultural perceptions were a source for them to explain certain attitudes and experiences as foreigners, being able to compare and to measure people's behaviours and customs against the ones they were used to or knew about. This was highlighted when they were part of a population that was not officially recognised, where they were officially called 'others' (Bailey, 2007; Carlisle 2006; McIlwaine 2007, 2011). Therefore in this context I assume the risk of the homogenisation of the term Latina; however, I understand it as the bond that my participants shared and, furthermore, how they identified and differentiated themselves in a city as culturally diverse as London.

### *Everyday life*

I would address the concept of everyday as the archetypal setting where domestication takes form. It is where practices are developed, giving rise to technological meanings that go beyond the characteristics of devices by involving social and material features (Hines, Nelson, & Tu, 2001; Mehra et al 2004; Rasmussen, 2000). In the words of Sorensen (2004), 'everyday life is a continuous engagement with artefacts; physically, mentally, emotionally and morally' (p. 1). To look at the everyday life day of a person is relevant because people's actions are not shaped in isolation: they are linked to practices, spaces and structures, all of which are part of this daily setting where technologies play a part, in a dialectic of change that involves both practices and technologies (Rasmussen, 2000). These routines and mundane contexts provide the setting for media and cultural consumption (Laughey, 2007). Therefore it is an analytical tool that provides the boundaries where appropriation is situated, yet it cannot be confined exclusively to the private sphere (Bakardjieva, 2005, 2006). To avoid this, in my research, although observations are carried out in private spaces such as households and classrooms, during interviews participants are invited to reflect on their daily routines that involve other spaces, such as jobs, shops, when socialising and in the street, among others. The belief behind this is that all these

experiences - although not related to technologies - help to shape their everyday lives by adding elements that could later be used when domesticating ICTs. In Bakardjieva's (2005) words:

> If everyday life is the scene of non-specialised activity of human beings, then it is also the scene where users of technology perform. It is a terrain when human actors objectify themselves drawing upon and appropriating socially given means with a view to their own situated plan and motives (p.58)

Furthermore, mobility and convergence of technologies also force researchers to extend the scope of 'daily life; beyond the household, which enriches the environment where they acquire meaning but also makes it more difficult to capture (Bakardjieva, 2006). Thus I conceive the everyday as not just what people do day after day but also the connections between different spheres of a person's life, their activities at work, home and leisure which are a combination of patterns and change, dynamics and controversies (Lie and Sorensen, 1996). All these elements have a role in the appropriation of technologies and ultimately in their distinctive ways to engage to them.

### *The internet*

I have chosen to understand it as a piece of technology. Yet it is not a single nor given device (Hine, 2000), but rather a 'range of practices, software and hardware technologies, modes of representation and interaction' (Miller and Slater, 2000, p.14). Its meaning is constructed in everyday life, fed by people's beliefs, expectations, experiences and networks, and rooted in their social and cultural contexts (Anderson and Tracey, 2001; Hine, 2000; Miller and Slater, 2000; Selwyn et al, 2005). It is a versatile, ever more expansive technology that can be used in a variety of ways, for different purposes and therefore have different meanings according to the particular circumstances of users (Selwyn et al 2005). This is what fascinated me the most about this technology; its meaning is rooted in the specific circumstances of users, which also change over time: how it acquires the role that it currently holds, what factors are involved in the domestication paths of different kinds of populations, and how the changes in daily routines can have a direct impact on what this technology means for people. Furthermore, I wished to study the role of the internet in the lives of those that are 'supposed' to benefit from it the most, as if it is a closed device whose use has been tightly prescribed by others, or in the words of Green and Haddon (2009), a device with a 'design script'. This is a kind of ICT that not only provides room to manoeuver, but whose significance might be completely different if the circumstances change (such as after migration, or in a new context of cultural and physical isolation). To tackle the core of the domestication process, I refrain from discussing the internet as a space for

performing identities, although this would be a fascinating line of research. This project could be seen as a first step towards this, leaving the door open for future projects that go one step further in scrutinising the online world of migrants and how it impacts on their identities.

### *Agency*

From Social Studies of Science and Technology there are elements that help to account for the nuances of the appropriation of technologies, inviting us to see them as possibilities for action: 'artefacts which may be both shaped by and shaping of the practices humans use in interaction with, around and through them' (Hutchby, 2001, p.444) Furthermore, not all objects offer the same range of possibilities to everyone, as these are rooted in individuals' positioning in the world, and in the context of use the main aspect to understand is how particular populations shape ICTs (Haddon, 2004). Factors that from one perspective can be seen as constraints can also be analysed as possibilities that may be seen or not by different cohorts of people, highlighting that it is their own 'making sense' that should prevail. Within this framework it is understood that users are an active force when shaping the internet, and therefore their agency is stressed. Far from being passive subjects, they are 'conscious actors' in a wide range of situations (Ralston 2006, p. 184 in Bailey, 2012). As Wessels (2012) defines, agency can be understood as 'meaningful action and includes reflection of past experience, interpretation of the present and consideration of future needs and aspiration' (p.1534). It is from this point of view that I approached the participants in this study. Thus, the journey of internet domestication cannot be addressed without first acknowledging that it is these women who construct their own internet.

### *Mobility*

This is a multi-layered concept which, as Cresswell (2006) points out, possesses an intangible nature that makes it an elusive object of study. Nonetheless I take advantage of this feature by applying it in two different - yet related - contexts within my research. The first and more predominant one lies within the framework of migration and transnationalism: mobility is perceived as the act of displacement, allowing people to move locations (2006). This enables me to frame the movements of people across the world and consequently to position my informants. Here I interpret mobility as a dynamic journey in a context of interconnected networks, multiple ties and interactions that link individuals across borders (Vertovec, 1999). This is relevant to my research because the changes produced by mobility alter both practices and understandings that are rooted in 'geographical and historical points of origin' (Vertovec,

1999, p. 455). The physical and symbolic aspects of it help to address questions of culture and identity, people's connections and flows (Georgiou, 2010), as well as experiences of displacement and belonging. This too allows me to explore the experiences of being a foreigner and the feelings related to the new surroundings that might be experienced as frightening and isolating, but also met with optimism and confidence (Bailey, 2013). New opportunities and struggles are mixed; nonetheless migrants often face a shift in their social position that includes feelings of homelessness, and having to face challenges and struggles due to marginalisation (Takeda, 2013). Furthermore, a product of living in a new culture is that everyday routines and life assumptions are evaluated in a new light (Bailey, 2013). It is within this framework that I address the role of the internet and its meaning, and how this mobility has an impact on the context where practices are located and meanings reshaped. It is a trigger of change, and ultimately plays a role in the positioning of new technologies in migrants' everyday lives. Secondly, I also refer to mobility in a technological way, by pointing out specific features of the newest ICTs and exploring how the internet can expand the geographical limits of the household and position it in a different landscape. Through their construction of the technology, these women were able to tune their communications and interactions in to their places of origin and belonging. Therefore they were part of a dynamic geography: migrants who had the option, for example, to consume media from their home country, or to expand or make strong their social networks through digital communications. These elements are a crucial part of their domestication process, and also an argument for why it is important to take into account migration and transnational components when studying the role of the internet in their everyday lives.

### *Empowerment*

In a broader perspective internet empowerment refers to this technology as an enabler, where users can achieve what was previously not possible, or too difficult (Amichai-Hamburger, 2008). However, I address empowerment through a digital inclusion framework, which allows me to discuss whether ICTs can or cannot make a difference in issues related to social inequalities, relative deprivation and social exclusion (Green and Haddon, 2009). I am also contesting early formulations of technologies as resources that are intrinsically good and needed in order to advance in life. Furthermore, I dispute the idea that if people merely access them they would be likely to put an end to such inequalities. I agree with those who point out that it is not only a matter of resources, but also of knowledge, skills and users' social circumstances (Wyatt et al, 2000). Whilst I am not denying that through the use of the internet more disadvantaged groups can indeed experience empowerment, I am confronting ideas which suggest that to be an internet user is the way to defeat vulnerabilities and to become part of the

mainstream of society. In this sense it might be analysed as a multi-layered and complex state, because as it is possible to see in my study that despite these women not being able to improve their quality of life or their socioeconomic status, or jobs, they still experienced a great sense of achievement when domesticating the internet. This is highlighted in cases where the internet was an unlikely option for participants, due to economic constraints and stories of lack of opportunities. For them to be able to acquire the technology and take steps to master it provided a great sense of achievement that could be extrapolated to other aspects of their lives. Therefore when I speak about empowerment I am not looking at the specific gains of internet use but at the feelings involved which are related to achievement, to control, and to being able to conquer something that is meaningful for them.

*The role of gender in this research*

Across cultures and historical periods there were very considerable differences in the ways in which women and men were expected to behave. What persisted were biological differences of sex, but what differed were social constructions of masculinity and femininity, i.e. constructions of gender. Gender became accepted, was the articulation of social expectations about how a person of a particular biological sex should behave, but that performance could differ significantly across time and space. What this separation of gender and sex did was to establish the idea that there was no such thing as naturally male or female behaviour. Simon de Beavoir (1972) famously wrote in *The Second Sex* that women are made, not born, and it is precisely this view that is at the heart of contemporary understandings of gender. Yet the constructed ideas of gender still play a considerable part in the maintenance of differences between sexes. The construction of what it means to be a woman is also culturally defined, and how this social and cultural baggage plays a part in the role of technologies is what interests me. Therefore in this research, gender as a concept it is not the main focus, but a resource from whence I explore women's responsibilities within the family and the home, their aspirations (technological and general life aspirations), job prospects, and their appropriation of the internet in a context of migration coloured by vulnerability. I do so by taking into account my participants' perspectives and experiences on the subject of internet domestication. Yet I did not ask them directly about their gender characteristics: these were addressed through their discussion of their role in their families and home, context of internet use and strategies in their households, and everyday life in London. This approach enabled me to characterise their context of living, and also to explore the non-technological challenges they experienced in their everyday, as gender is one of the factors that influence how people experience migration (Giralt and Bailey, 2010).

On the other hand I cannot ignore the literature on ICTs and gender, which will be reviewed later. Yet another of the interesting perspectives that my research brought to light is that usually

women and minorities are amongst those classified as technologically disadvantaged (Leung, 2005). In fact, it is logical to consider that those who have fewer opportunities in life and also face socioeconomic troubles are last to acquire and appropriate technologies. Literature on the subject has recognised that of people in these situations, it is women in particular who are excluded the most (Cabrera- Balleza, 2006; Goh, 2013; Wajcman 2000, 2007, 2010). Though it is not possible to generalise on the subject, with this ethnographic account of adult migrant women I can show how complex the terrain is, and the differences between women that share similar characteristics. Therefore among this group of participants it is possible to find the women that are the savviest members of the household (more than the husbands and young children), as well as those that are just starting to use this technology. There are people that learned how to use it in a educational environment while others acquired their knowledge in the adversity of their experiences as foreigners. Furthermore the results of this study are an indication of something that has lately been claimed by scholars, that the gender divide in internet access is sharply decreasing (Helsper, 2010; Kang, 2012; Ono, 2003), and that this does not hold true exclusively for educated subjects, but also for those in vulnerable conditions.

## 1.2 Research questions and preliminary findings

This thesis aims to be a snapshot of how these women's experiences as migrants in London shape their construction of the internet. I focus on how Latinas, in circumstances of vulnerability, appropriate this technology; on the practices that surround this; and on how their contexts and migrant status informs both interpretations and practices. Thus, the main theoretical question is: *to what extent can domestication, migration and transnational literature explain the construction of the internet by Latina migrants in vulnerable conditions?*

The main empirical question that this thesis then seeks to answer is: *how do they engage with the internet in their everyday lives?* The subsequent questions addressing meanings: *what is the role of the internet for Latinas in vulnerable conditions in London?* Secondly, addressing practices, I ask: *why do Latinas in a context of vulnerability in London appropriate the internet?* And finally, addressing sociocultural contexts: *how does their context as immigrants and as disadvantaged women contribute to the role of the internet in their everyday lives? And which elements act as resources and which as limitations for them in engaging with this technology?*

In terms of theory, with this project I explore how technology appropriation and cultural understandings go hand in hand; the negotiation process of both technology's meaning and users' perceptions of the world is to some extent related to the way technology is appropriated.

Their social context plays a crucial role in understanding the affordances that the participants perceive in the technology and in the role they subsequently give to the internet in their everyday lives. Nonetheless, when giving meaning to the internet and creating practices around it, not only do the users' current contexts need to be brought forward, but also their life stories, their previous technological experience, and how they position themselves in a transnational landscaped. Furthermore, when analysing from a cultural standpoint the practices through which meaning is created, it becomes clear that technology appropriation is not unidirectional, but leaves an imprint on these Latinas and their immigrant experiences, highlighting the dynamics of the process.

The empirical value of this study lies in the originality of selecting this population. Latinos are a growing migrant group in London that nonetheless remains in the shadows, described as "invisible" (Bailey, 2007; McIlwaine, 2007, 2011). Why give attention to a group that apparently has so little impact on society that it is considered "invisible"? Because they are part of the excluded and marginalised who make use of technology. This opens a door to research into populations in adverse contexts and allows researchers to scrutinise the core of internet appropriation by groups that are not expected to access it. I am not suggesting that Latinos are more worth studying than other migrant groups, but that they are an interesting starting point for researching disadvantaged groups' engagement with new technologies. Furthermore, the diversity of the Latinas in this study, in terms of their life stories and experiences in relation to the internet as well the variety of their aims in coming to London, enrich the study of how this technology is embraced and ultimately constructed.

### *1.2.1 Diversities and communalities*

The literature, as well as – I should admit - my own prejudices, led to an expectation of finding in this 'disadvantaged' population women who were complete strangers to the internet and considered it a technology needing to be "tamed". Although I did find this to some extent in the group of women attending computer classes for beginners, it was not the case for the vast majority. Some of these women are *currently* part of a disadvantaged group, but carry with them previous experience with computers and particularly with the internet. I shall argue that, with a drastic change of environment and social circumstances such as these women have undergone, the role and meaning of technologies also change. Regarding those who were just starting on the path of domestication of the internet, a couple of points need to be made. First, they were not complete strangers to this technology: they knew about it, they saw others using it, even in their own homes or workplaces. They were attending the particular class I visited because they wanted to "own" the technology. Yet they brought with them their scant experience, fears and frustrations, as well as their beliefs and discourses about technology.

Secondly, the device from which they accessed the internet was, for the majority, a computer. This is not a mere detail in the context of my study. On the contrary, I wish to make a case concerning how important it was for them, and perhaps for other new users, to also 'domesticate' the computer.

Overall they were very diverse in terms of their backgrounds, ages, life stories and levels of education. It is therefore necessary to account for their different points of departure and trajectories, and how their current context led them to a common ground when interpreting the affordances of technology. One of the most distinctive characteristics of these women in their relationship with the internet lies in the fact that they are foreigners. Being migrant from an ethnic minority is, in this case, the starting point for several disadvantages that have a kind of domino effect, which I found reflected in their online practices and experiences: they do not know English, therefore the kinds of jobs they can access are limited; the working hours of these jobs are hectic and unconventional and consequently they have little time or need to make great efforts to attend language classes. They are also isolated because they cannot communicate except with other Spanish speakers, and the nature and timetable of their jobs increases their loneliness. They do not understand radio, television or newspapers in English, so some of them turn to the internet in order to consume cultural products that make sense to them. For most, this is also their way of being "sociable" and communicating with others, of enhancing ties with family and friends who are not with them but nonetheless are part of their everyday lives, and an attempt to compensate for the lack of sociability in their lives.

Participants stated that they conceived of the internet and new technologies as "a must" and as the driver for progress and success in life, both professionally and personally ("the way people live nowadays", "essential, you cannot live in a world without the internet", as some of them, even the most technologically challenged, expressed it). Herein lies the first contradiction, that despite these discourses the internet was not always a protagonist in their day-to-day lives. Nevertheless, their current context as immigrants is a starting point for either the domestication of the technology or its redomestication, providing it with a new meaning in accordance with their own new circumstances. In other words, all these Latinas struggle with similar aspects of their experience, and therefore some of their reasons for engaging with the internet are rooted in aspects of their lives as migrants. This explains some of the activities they engage in, like communication with distant family and friends, and consumption of music, television and news from their home country, which they organise around their usually hectic schedules. They also make use of translation websites, as well as looking for information about London such as maps, transport details and listings of free activities. Only the more confident participants used the web to a limited extent to make transactions such as buying plane tickets or consumer

goods. Other participants asked someone else do this for them (proxy use) or simply preferred to make financial transactions in person, perceiving a high level of risk in online banking and transactions.

They also reported using the net as a place to learn, including in a broad sense, for example visiting websites such as Wikipedia or YouTube to get a recipe, or "Googling" health queries. This was perhaps an indicator of the more aspirational aspect of technology use - using it not only because of the perceived benefits in communication and cultural consumption, but also to be part of a technological wave that many of them had heard about or witnessed without having the opportunity to be part of it. This explains why they stated that they felt more knowledgeable while using the Internet, no matter what activity they were performing. This was especially clearly observed in those who had started to domesticate the computer, as well as the Internet. Furthermore, they reported that their experience as immigrants improved considerably as a result of using the Internet, regardless of the nature and extent of the activities performed. The main drivers for these women's engaging with the Internet were the availability and inexpensiveness of this technology, as well as the expectations and social discourses that surround it. On the other hand, inexperience with the access devices (mainly computers) and lack of knowledge of the terminology and operation of the Internet brought insecurities and frustrations that hampered their domestication of the technology.

Overall, the internet had a role for these women in maintaining their transnational ties and reconnecting them with their cultural identity, as well as being a medium that helped them to fill the gaps inherent in their condition as immigrants in a foreign city. It was also interesting to note how this context permeated their experiences - regardless of whether they were new or experienced internet users, their practices and interests were rather similar. This sheds light on the importance of the context when appropriating technology, as well as on how this cannot be understood without giving attention to aspects of their cultural identity as immigrants in interpreting the technology. With the Internet they 'travel' home, but also interpret their new home, although with a wide range of confidence and expertise, and this helps them to negotiate their identity as women, mothers and immigrants in this new context.

## 1.3 A note on the methodology

The fieldwork was conducted with thirty-seven Latinas living in London who migrated as adults. They were aged between 18 and 85 years old, with a range of educational backgrounds, marital and legal statuses and with earnings close to the minimum wage. The fieldwork was carried out primarily through in-depth interviews in combination with ethnography in the form

of participant observation in computer classes for beginners in two Latino community centres and also in five households. All participants accessed the internet at least twice a week, although the places varied among their own homes, cybercafés and community centres.

The aim was to get an insight into their experiences and their ways of thinking about the technologies, as well as the values and motivations that lay behind these. Through a qualitative design, participants gain a predominant voice in research and shape it according to their own realities. This was consistent with a domestication approach and also more suitable than applying measurement procedures as in quantitative work (Bryman, 2008). The richness of qualitative methods is based in its context-specificity, with a focus on the "how" more than on the "what" (Berger, 1998; Esterberg, 2002; Fontana and Frey, 2005). This was also the main reason for choosing in-depth interviews as the main method of gaining access to participants' experiences (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000; Peräkylä, 2005). Interviews offered the scope to explore new as well as significant issues and were also a more suitable approach for addressing private and emotionally charged topics (Bryman, 2008; Rosenblum, 1987). The feelings, attitudes and beliefs that respondents are not necessarily aware of are also better researched by conducting interviews (Berger, 1998) and achieving "a fine-textured understanding" (Gaskell, 2000 p. 39).

The complexity and dynamic features of social life necessitate using more than one method in order to gain a better understanding of a social phenomenon (Fontana and Frey, 2005). The need for a natural setting established by earlier researchers in the field (see for example Bakardjieva, 2005; Leung, 2005; Miller and Slater, 2000) prompted me to actually sit on the other side of the screen with the women who took part in this study, and to have access to details that may be unnoticed by the participants themselves. This is why I took an ethnographic approach and chose participant observation as a secondary method. Through participant observation it was possible to have access to participants' life stories and to either match or contrast the behaviour they report with how they actually behave (Flick, 2002; Gilbert, 2008; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Furthermore, it helped to contextualise different aspects of their lives, hence providing an insight into where people actually place technologies in an everyday setting and how they interpret them. Thus 'people's actions and accounts were studied in everyday contexts (…) "'in the field', where they naturally happen" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). Therefore, the information potentially to be collected increased in breadth and depth, enabling triangulation of observations and impressions, as well as follow-up on contradictions (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000). This experiential knowledge provided an "intuitive understanding" of the culture that has been studied, giving an added perspective to the analysis of the data (Bernard, 2006).

Regarding where the observations took place, the decision was to look for a formal instance where these women had the opportunity to gather and to interact with technology on a regular basis. Though it is possible to study domestication in a cybercafé, the most convenient approximation to these women was to look for places where computers with internet connections are free, and also assistance in their own language is available (assuming that English was one of the constraints for these women). During the years of the fieldwork (2010-2011) only two centres offered such services (i.e. internet/computer classes); these were the Indoamerican Refugee Migrant Organisation (IRMO) and Casa Latina. Both are registered charities conceived as places to offer help and support to Latino immigrants in disadvantaged conditions, and who require legal help, as well as orientation for services and benefits in general, and other kind of basic and much-needed courses, such as IT and languages. These were located in poor neighbourhoods: Kilburn and Brixton, respectively. Both organisations agreed to my presence as a researcher as well as a teacher. The data collected took the form of interviews and fieldwork notes with observations and comments during and after classes, as well as observations of and interactions with participants. Furthermore I carried out observations in five participants' homes, with Latinas that attended to classes and with those that did not. These were more limited in terms of breadth yet provided the possibility to explore internet appropriation in an intimate setting.

## 1.4 The Latinas' world in London: an introduction

Migration scholars have labelled the Latino community in London 'invisible' because its numbers are small and not officially monitored (Bailey, 2007; Carlisle 2006; McIlwaine 2007, 2011). This is a result of the census terminology in the UK, which is based on race (i.e. categories are defined by physical characteristics) (Berthoud et al., 1997; Healey, 2006) and categorises many Latinos as "other". Therefore there is a lack of formal data regarding how many there are in the UK and under what conditions. Sources suggest that by 2001 there were 73,785 inhabitants of England and Wales declaring a South American country of birth, but the true figure is thought to have been at least twice this (Carlisle, 2006):

> The highest estimates suggest up to '200,000 Brazilians, 140,000 Colombians, 70–90,000 Ecuadorians and 10–15,000 Peruvians' (FCO 2007: 5 quoted in MacIlwaine 2007: 7). Although it is very difficult to establish the accuracy of these estimates, there seems to be a consensus about the rapid growth of this population in the UK and about the diversification of immigration routes used by South Americans coming to Europe. This is also an important group to study because high levels of inequality and poverty

may affect significant sectors of this population (Carlisle 2006, p. 388)

There are several reasons why a person may choose to change his/her country of residence. Some are from former colonies; for others it is due to their political status, such as refugees and asylum seekers; others are economic migrants who are motivated by financial aspirations, usually moving from less to more developed countries (Turner, 2006). In the case of Latin Americans, lack of evidence prevents robust theorisation about their reasons for choosing the UK as a destination. Nonetheless, political reasons (especially during the 1980s and 1990s) have been suggested, as well as economic motivations: crises in their homelands as well as the pursuit of career opportunities (Giralt and Bailey, 2010; McIlwaine, 2011; Retis, 2006, 2010). There is also an indication of reasons linked to personal relationships, such as broken marriages and failed relationships (McIlwaine, 2011). The literature, though scarce, is consistent with the testimonies collected for this thesis. Researchers have also noted the phenomenon of "split families' which is predominant among the community: 'while adult migrants may not see their elderly parents for decades, we also found that many parents lived apart from their children for extended periods" (Giralt and Bailey, 2010, p. 389). They also commented on the sense of guilt and obligation towards those left in the country of origin that consumed Latino migrants, citing this as a reason why remittances were fairly common (2010).

A significant number of my participants were involved in a secondary migration movement (McIlwaine, 2011; Vertovec, 2007). They had begun their migrant lives in Spain, where traditions and language are similar to those of their own Latino culture. At one time that country had offered possibilities in terms of jobs, and access to permanent residency and citizenship had been easier to obtain[1]. Years later they had found themselves trapped in the midst of the country's economic downfall, which forced them to look for a new destination that could offer them more opportunities, and made the UK, and specifically London, an interesting city. There, through word of mouth, manual jobs could be found easily, though usually exploitation and hectic work hours were also part of the deal. Some women, especially those who had a higher level of education and professional experience, had seen in London the opportunity to improve their language skills, and also had an expectation of working in their previous occupation. Nonetheless, they were aware that arriving without English literacy or valid documentation would cause a delay in their original plans and that they would have to work their way up in terms of both language mastery and diploma authentication.

[1] This aspect contributes to Latino invisibility in the UK: many who enter the country hold European passports and therefore appear in official statistics as Europeans, but identify themselves as Latin Americans.

Despite the fact that many of them were currently facing financial hardship, they identified the city as a profitable one and full of opportunities. Some had heard of or witnessed, for example, happy stories of previous immigrants to the UK returning to their hometowns after a couple of years of hard work as 'successful' and even 'millionaires', which most often meant that they had been able to build a house with enough room for all their relatives, or to start their own business, and this had persuaded them to follow the same path. However, financial and career improvements were not the only reasons for abandoning their home country. There were also those who had left after experiencing a distressing family situation like the death of a loved one or their partner's betrayal. Then London had become a sort of clean canvas for starting over and building a new life far away. Hence there was a great diversity of goals and expectations, such as saving money and returning to their home country, settling down, achieving citizenship and bringing their close family to London, developing a more international career, or acquiring expertise in English, among others. Despite these differing aims, the financial barriers endured in order to move home remained rather similar, such as affording a plane ticket, a student visa, fees for an English course and some living expenses. In order to afford these, many took loans since their savings were not enough, and this had inevitably added to their debts and to the pressure to earn money. As a result, many were primarily focused on jobs.

In terms of the logistics of changing countries, there is a strong network ties component (McIlwaine, 2006, 2007) - which is a migration process enhanced by interpersonal connections that link immigrants (former and potential) and make it easier for new migrants to find jobs in the destination country (Turner, 2006). They usually knew someone before arriving in London, e.g. a relative, or a friend of a friend, or a contact through the community. This person had acted as a 'host' and, although it was not necessarily someone close to them, he or she had helped them to settle in, offering a place to sleep for the first weeks or more, and sometimes helping them to find a job - usually, through recommendations from other Latino acquaintances, as a cleaner. This practice of hosting and helping the newcomer speaks of cultural roots where solidarity is much practised and much appreciated, as also noticed by previous researchers on Latin Americans in the UK (Bailey and Giralt, 2011; Carlisle, 2006; McIlwaine, 2011). According to Diminescu (2008) these kinds of practices are not restricted to this community, but on the contrary are common among illegal immigrants, creating a "social form of integration from the bottom up" (p. 571) and enabling individuals with few resources to move across the globe in circumstances that might prove impossible without this help.

Despite the diversity of their reasons for leaving their country and their different backgrounds as highly skilled professionals or women with no qualifications, this group presented a similarity in their lives as migrants in London. Since they were not officially monitored, they were

'invisible and homogenised in their differences, history, culture, and experiences' (Bailey 2007, p. 213) and likely to be marginalised from services and from society (Bailey, 2007; Carlisle, 2006). This aspect should not be ignored because it is strongly related to status, and because legislation and perception shape identification and position, which in this case increase the vulnerability of their position (Platt, 2007). Furthermore, "Latin America" is a homogeneous label that does not account for the complexity and the cultural differences in terms of languages, histories and political systems among its people (Bailey, 2007). Finally, as previously pointed out, many of these individuals are part of a secondary migration movement: they possess European documents, but remain Latinos.

Existing data on Latin Americans shows their disadvantaged social position in the UK, with high levels of unemployment and discrimination leading to poor access to education and healthcare, and lower levels of income (Carlisle, 2006). However, motivated by the increase in this population, researchers and charities have been seeking more information about Latinos' quality of life and experiences in this country. Queen Mary University, the Latin American Women's Rights Services and the Trust for London joined forces to conduct the first and most comprehensive study of Latinos in London in 2011 (McIlwaine, Cock and Linneker, 2011). The data was collected through surveys and interviews and though it is not representative, it sheds light on their experiences in London. From these findings it is possible to see that Latinos are similar in number to other large migrant and ethnic groups in the capital, estimated at 113,500, although they do not yet appear in government records. In terms of jobs, more than half were employed in low-skilled and low-paid occupations such as cleaning, catering and hospitality services, and one third lived in overcrowded accommodation, which exemplifies the difficulties they face in their everyday lives. Access to services was also precarious, with one in five having never visited a GP and six out of 10 having never been to a dentist; furthermore, just one in five received some form of social benefit. Language was another point of concern for this group, mentioned as one of the barriers directly affecting their quality of life: more than half identified English language difficulties as their main problem - even more than housing, immigration status or badly paid jobs (McIlwaine et al 2011). Their lack of language abilities also contributed to positioning them in a low-income bracket, with elementary jobs that were frequently less skilled than those they had held in their home countries (McIlwaine, 2007). Overall, regardless of their background, women with a professional past and education and those without were all found to face these difficulties. They all maintained strong links with family and friends, usually by phone, email and online chat on a daily basis (McIlwaine, 2011). Overall this scenario mirrors the experiences of Latinas revealed by the present study and it is in this context that the internet emerges as a practice, but with a new meaning: one that accords with these disadvantages and opportunities alike. It is, for example, a way of coping with

distance, loneliness and lack of understanding of the language, a way to *travel* home. This implies that the meaning of the technology changes, as well as their technological practices. Therefore theories related to internet appropriation which tackle practices and meaning have proved useful for analysing the role of this technology in this context. However, aspects of these women's process as immigrants detached from the mainstream society and isolated from the dominant culture force us to look also for transnational and migration theories and concepts that help us to understand the meanings of internet use in these circumstances.

## 1.5 Organisation of the thesis

This thesis is organised in eight chapters, the **first chapter** being this outline. In the **second chapter** I focus on a revision of the theory. I start by addressing Domestication and its key elements, and reflect how this approach can help to identify how the internet's meanings and practices are born. Later, I turn to the literature on cultural appropriation and digital engagement from a constructivist approach and how it has been applied to vulnerable populations. Finally, I explore migration and transnational literature and how new technologies have impacted migration experiences and the boundaries of the home. In the **third chapter** I aim to operationalise these concepts into units of analysis in order to address: domestication and redomestication in a transnational context; devices and their interpretations and affordances; and meanings and practices explained by their cultural attachments and social understandings. I also provide a detailed account of how the project was conducted, touching on research design, decisions and surprises encountered during the fieldwork, the nuances of the population, sampling and data analysis. I finish this chapter by addressing ethical concerns that are inherent in working with vulnerable women, and the methodological limitations of the study. The **fourth chapter** offers an empirical overview of Latinas in London, addressing their immigration trajectories, their everyday lives and the advantages and disadvantages encountered in the city. The key subjects are the role of language, their cultural codes and the nature of their internet connections and practices. **Chapter five** is dedicated to their domestication experiences, how meanings and articulations are constructed and the composition of their moral economies and articulations with the internet. Next, **chapter six** addresses cultural interpretations and how these interact with elements such as the nature of their communications, family roles and responsibilities, media consumption and the importance of learning. In **chapter seven** I present the theoretical findings of the thesis by combining migration and transnationalism theories with domestication approach. I also address domestication in migrant populations, deconstructing the user and her social background, and how transnationalism and affordances need to be added into the debate. Language, family roles, and marginalisation are also part of the empirical findings

that build upon reasons to engage technologically, the creation of meanings and limitations on their internet appropriation. By discussing the empirical and theoretical implications of how Latinas construct the internet, I present the importance of resurfacing concepts such as redomestication, and also of technological trajectories, and discuss the digital vis-à-vis geographical positioning of users. Finally in the **eighth chapter** I present the conclusions by assessing the theoretical, methodological and empirical contributions of this research. These are related to concepts of the role of cultural understanding and affordances, domestication in the digital era, and how transnationalism interacts with technological paths.

# CHAPTER II

## INTERNET DOMESTICATION AND CULTURAL APPROPRIATION IN A TRANSNATIONAL CONTEXT

Domestication focuses on the cultural embeddedness of technologies, moving from cognitive issues to the symbolical and practical (Sørensen et al, 2000). It identifies people's culture, routines and practices and how ICTs fit into these (2000). The culture of the household, as well as the routines of the everyday, are the context in which artefacts acquire meaning and are domesticated, becoming familiar, but also triggering change, which highlights people's cultures, routines and practices (Silverstone and Haddon, 1996; Sørensen et al, 2000). The introduction of newer technologies such as the internet, in combination with users who live between cultures and with transnational ties leads us to consider domestication under a new light. Geographical location challenges the concepts of home, boundaries and practices, and has a direct impact on the complexity of the sociocultural environment, people's negotiations and artefacts' acquisition of meanings. Therefore migrants' domestication of technologies and to what extent they have an active role in their lives are yet to be explored.

In this chapter I aim to provide a critical assessment of the literature on domestication and empirical studies that address internet use, particularly in disadvantaged and migrant populations. I will do this by reviewing earlier formulations of the theory, such as the work led by Silverstone and colleagues, as well the latest contributions, particularly those that have combined it with other perspectives that contribute to characterising both users' contexts and domestication in terms of the internet. I will therefore start by reviewing the three pillars of the theory and how these can be related to the selected population. I will next summarise how domestication scholars have tackled internet use both theoretically and empirically. Later I will shift to non-domestication approaches, looking at the importance of culture when studying internet adoption and use. Finally I will address the transnationality of the household and migration literature on new technologies, as both aspects enrich the assessment of the social context.

### 2.1 The 'taming' of technologies

After purchasing, devices are moulded in a rich environment where routines, beliefs, values, among others have a say in what they mean and the place they acquire. Consuming technologies

is an active and ever changing practice, "a transformative and transcendent process of the appropriation and conversion of meaning" (Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley, 1992, pp. 4). This is what domestication stands for, far from technological deterministic perspectives. The consumer culture values technological devices not solely in terms of material objects, but for its social and symbolic meanings. After design and before acquiring collective meanings, the core of the consumption process take place in the domestic arena, inviting questions regarding how is it appropriated in the intimacy of the household (Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992). The key aspects of domestication that grasp these elements and its interactions are (a) the household's moral economy; (b) the stages at which meaning is created and its connection to practices; and (c) double and triple articulations or how it relates to social meanings and understandings. These concepts encompass the core of the theory and facilitate an understanding of how meanings are created.

### *2.1.1. Moral economy*

It matters who is in front of the computer screen. In order to assess both meanings and practices in relation to the internet and to enrich the understanding of how and why certain artefacts acquire a leading role while others remain peripheral to an individual's life, it is relevant to ask questions about the user. In early domestication work the answers lie in the heart of the household. In the seminal work of Silverstone and colleagues, it was pointe out that technology is considered as practices and meanings which are born "locally" (i.e. privately) but are in constant interaction with the social arena (Silverstone et al., 1990). The moral economy accounts for its articulations within the household and society. This economy reflects the household's daily practices and routines, as well as beliefs, values, culture and the householders' life stories and social networks (Silverstone et al, 1992).

> The moral economy of the household is therefore both an economy of meanings and a meaningful economy; and in both of its two dimensions it stands in a potentially or actually transformative relationship to the public, objective economy of the exchange of goods and meanings. (Silverstone et al., 1992, p.18)

The context provides clues to understanding the geography of the technology within the boundaries of the household, and also of the roles and power relations that are born there. The family, the first unit studied by domestication scholars, helps to clarify the meaning of the device *in relation to* a specific moment, as well as to the other members of the household and their purposes and interests. The concept grasps how users frame their world and how they play

with the elements they have to hand by incorporating their interactions with social and economic surroundings (Silverstone et al., 1990). After appropriation, meanings leave the house and circulate in society, accounting for consumption activities as such and, through users, inevitably becoming involved in the public economy (Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992). The elements of consumption range from purchase to appropriation, to articulation with society as the concept combines user agency, meanings and domestic practices, where the transactional system of meaning goes hand in hand with the economic circulation of ICT goods (Sørensen, 2004, p. 6). The moral economy ties the household to a social stream where common understandings are created, highlighting the relational nature of the theory, which untangles the constant negotiation of the public and the private (Silverstone, 2006). This meaning, which has been agreed outside the household, cannot be absolutely cut out of the analysis[2].

As the moral economy tackles the less tangible aspects of the domestication process, such as beliefs, values and culture, it has recently been used as a leading concept to research various media-related issues, such as family appropriation of smartphones (Mascheroni, 2013) and regulation of online gambling and pornography (Bruce, 2008). Notwithstanding that those are just two examples of how a concept forged in a pre-internet era can still be successfully applied by the book in modern and updated research, there are certain problematic aspects that need to be taken into account. For example, Bakardjieva (2006) has pointed out how due to the eruption of new technologies households are no longer confined and stable places where the moral economy freely unfolds. As she reflects from her experience in fieldwork during past years:

> 'Household values and ways of life had to be reinvented and renegotiated almost on a daily basis and that was exactly where the new medium was best fitting in … my respondents and their families were more interested in employing the medium in order to propel themselves into new realms of activity, knowledge and values than to preserve a static order of habits, identities and relationships' (Bakardjieva 2006, p. 66)

She stresses the dynamic aspect of the moral economy, and how the subjects were dealing with constant changes. Furthermore, she recognises how the division between public and private is the 'front door', and the public sphere seems significantly blurred, generating rather a semi-public sphere which weakens the concept of moral economy as a defined unit of analysis. This has also been noted by Sorensen (2006), who states that 'the concept of a moral economy is too

[2] This is social aspect that I will address by tackling expectations and pressures arising from internet use. I concentrate on how, within the household, commodities are appropriated and redefined according to the users' values and interests, addressing the family dynamics and setting defined boundaries - that is, the relation between the material and symbolic streams, and how these are informed by the social stream.

strict and stable in a fluid modernity' (p. 57). Indeed the moral economy is fed by people's experiences and routines, and when these are constantly shifting there should also be a response in the moral economy of the household. This is a sign of the interplay between technologies and the place where they are located, which is also a source of confusion in modern times, where technologies converge and become even more portable, sometimes acquiring an omnipresent status in modern life. This is also a challenge for me, when looking at how women domesticate the internet in a migration context, where the concept of household is difficult to replicate, and where domestication also takes place outside of the boundaries of the home, as I found in this research. The latter is of course not new and researchers have previously empirically applied domestication in different contexts, such as in community centres and offices, among others (Berker et al 2006). Yet these changes left me wondering what would happen when this more dynamic economy, responsive to changes, is shaken to its foundations after migration. There is also the question of mobility and how the geography of a household is expanded beyond its own walls with the use of the internet. These elements led to its specific construction in a precise moment and leaves the door open to reassess technological construction when the forces change direction. The question is how the moral economy affects the domestication of the internet in an immigrant's house, a transnational home.

### *2.1.2. Stages of domestication*

What happens with devices after purchase and before they become 'part of the furniture' is a process described in the four stages of domestication. These devices are designed for a function, a purpose, but how, when and why they are used varies. As Georgiou (2006) argues: "Media do not just 'fit in' a pre-existing everyday - they alter repertoires, methods and practised communication" (p.14). Domestication addresses this back and forth between the object in question, the other objects and the user, in stages through which artefacts become part of a household (Silverstone et al., 1992). Each of the steps – commodification, objectification, incorporation and conversion - captures intentions, values and changes in the technological geography of a space. It serves as a sort of map, and gives an order and a space to the process, from the intentions inscribed in the device to the symbolical meaning reached.

The process starts with *commodification,* which refers to institutional production (Laughey, 2007), before the individual takes possession of the technology. This applies to the device – for example, a computer or television set – and the content – the software or programme selected (Silverstone et al., 1992). It makes reference to the design and intentions inscribed and the expectations associated with it, which later will stress the household's role as the link between

the public and the private (Silverstone, 2006). The next step, *objectification*, focuses on the 'physical dispositions of the object' (Silverstone et al., 1992, p. 22), as well as in its social and cultural spaces (Silverstone, 2006). Its location is not neutral and leaves traces of values and aesthetic, providing a map of the geography of the home that touches on the moral economy (Silverstone et al., 1992). This idea has led to certain criticisms because relegates the device to a concrete time and space without accounting for its ubiquity, limiting this appropriation to one determined space. It is also problematic when analysing non-material artefacts such as computer software or television programmes, since these can be articulated in other ways with the moral economy, being integrated into the household by, for example, the discourse they originate (Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992). *Incorporation* concerns how technologies are used and strategies to achieve it (Silverstone, 2006). Though designers determine their functions, devices could serve other purposes, which highlights their malleability. This stage stresses where the technology is located, when it is used, by whom and how. In the final stage, *conversion*, the emphasis is on the symbolical meaning and how that passes through the household to the outside world (Hynes and Rommes, 2006; Silverstone et al., 1992).

Although these started out as well defined and fairly fixed stages, when revising domestication more than a decade later Silverstone (2006) took a looser approach, changing their original order. This is, in my interpretation, a response to the vast development of new technologies, which have changed the configuration of the world since access to the internet became widely available. The stages remain valid and these small changes demonstrate their endurance over time and through technological change. Nonetheless, if followed word for word, the approach still relies heavily on the practices of consumption within a defined physical place that, although important, should not be the only consideration. What domestication theory seems to miss is that, like the very nature of the users, appropriation is a non-linear process with blurry boundaries. Silverstone (2006) addressed some of this critique, arguing that "both parties to the interaction, the human and the technological, and in both material and symbolic ways, were, and are, in a constant dialectic of change" (p. 232), and thus providing space for improvisation and particularities which enrich the account - albeit pose new challenges. One such challenge is to take into account the evolving process without glossing over the complexities and ambiguities posed by the transnational context and everyday lives of migrants.

### *2.1.3. Double & triple articulations*

When studying how artefacts become part of the household, another risk is that of focusing too much on the materiality of the technology, its display and features. This is part of the critique of

social construction theories (for further discussion, see Siles and Boczkowski, 2012). ICTs are also media: they convey messages and meanings - a crucial aspect that cannot be neglected, because it gives these artefacts a different status from that of a washing machine or a hairdryer[3]. This property has been tackled through the concept of **double articulation,** which encompasses the constant interaction between public and private spheres when consuming ICTs. Doing so provides links between the members of a household and the world "beyond their front door" (Silverstone et al., 1992, p. 15):

> By 'double articulation' we mean to refer to the ways in which information and communication technologies, uniquely, are the means (the media) whereby public and private meanings are mutually negotiated; as well as being the products themselves, through consumption, of such negotiations of meaning. (Silverstone et al., 1992, p. 28)

It is based on a semiotic approach to technologies where ICTs are considered meaningful texts that are written in production and marketing and read in consumption (Silverstone et al., 1990, p. 50). They acquire meaning at all stages of production, marketing and consumption (1990) and, since they carry a message, they therefore have two meanings: as artefacts and as media. These two levels of meaning are interrelated (1990). The meaning of the technology as an object is somehow defined by culture and embedded in public discourse, although there is still space for negotiation in the household (1990). Most importantly, the starting point for this is the discourses of design and marketing, but what it highlights is the agency of users and what sense they make of this:

> The consumption of both, the technology as text and the texts themselves (as technologies), defines the meaning of information and communication technologies, as objects and as discourses. It is in this sense that they are doubly articulated. (Silverstone et al., 1990, p. 62)

The property of ICTs as technology and media forces us to read technologies in the social context where they were created. This highlights the social embeddedness of technology by recognising that developments are neither born nor read in isolation. At each stage of technology production, marketing and use, there are practices and discourses, which contribute

[3] I am not arguing these are not worthwhile or interesting to study, only stressing their different nature from communication and information technologies. Furthermore, non-media artefacts can also be studied in terms of the domestication framework.

to the meaning of technologies, that should not be ignored[4]. The cultural value of the artefact as an object is recognised, as is the value generated by its message for the content, programmes, talk and so forth (Silverstone et al., 1990). For example, for recent internet users, such as some of my participants, it is possible to reflect on the social discourses, pressures and expectations they have experienced to start using the internet. These impacts users' domestication, and when they read technologies, they do so in accordance with their own desires, but also with their social baggage. Some of the domestication cases that I encountered - successful or not - were born of such social pressure to appropriate the internet that the reading of the technology was influenced by this external force, as well as by the particular challenges faced by the individuals concerned. Consequently, the meaning of the internet for these women, and for the ways they later socialised with others, bears traces of all the stages of domestication and is engraved within the context where it took place.

Yet there are two aspects to be addressed. (a) The textual interface was written during production and marketing: processes that had in mind an ideal user who was far from being a migrant from low socioeconomic strata. Not only does the language itself become a problem (understanding the content), but so does "reading" a technology, managing a technological jargon that mostly makes sense in English. (b) The sociocultural context where messages are negotiated is complex as there is a mixture of locations and messages, households and inhabitants that crash through frontiers. What are the messages and social meanings they are negotiating? What is the social embeddedness of the household if users virtually position their households back in their home country? Can they really ignore the social meanings and messages of the mainstream media?

The process of media consumption is also fed by the symbolic environment, giving rise to the **third articulation** (Hartmann, 2006; Silverstone and Haddon, 1996). It acknowledges the interaction between object (e.g. the computer), content (e.g. emails), and context (e.g. during a computer class in a community centre) (Courtois, Mechant, Paulussen and De Marez, 2011, p. 402). The symbolic environment where media are consumed provides valuable information about the process and how it relates to users and it is highly relevant to understanding the meanings associated with it. Some scholars even have argued that it is within this symbolic environment that domestication as an approach is entirely fulfilled (Hartmann, 2006).

However, it has been debated whether it is indeed useful to make a distinction between message and context meaning, and whether this is possible empirically (Hartmann, 2006; Livingstone, 2007). To date only one project has undertaken this task: a study of teenagers in a media rich

[4] Hence the urge to turn to theoretical approaches that address the reality of the population in question.

environment (Courtois et al, 2011). The findings led researchers to conclude that it is essential to have knowledge of the space where devices are appropriated as they found a link between meanings associated with devices and the specific context in which they are consumed: "we found multiple examples of how context influences the meanings of consumption, regardless of the object … and different objects with the same social and spatial context to consume similar texts" (p. 416). These aspects are intrinsic to the consumption, reception and use process and also a remainder of how relevant and needed a holistic approach is to understand media in context (Hartmann, 2006).

### *2.1.4. Challenges and contributions of internet domestication*

Domestication has come a long way and has been used as a framework for understanding new media and internet take-up (Bakardjieva, 2005, 2006; Haddon, 2004; Russo, 2006; Ward, 2005, 2006). Nonetheless there are two main pieces of research that are close to my area of interest and have a rationale and empirical approach that contribute to the purpose of this thesis. The first is Bakardjieva's (2005) study of the internet in everyday life. Her theoretical framework was based on domestication but in combination with other approaches, one of the most prominent being Voloshinov's language process. This novel view led her to analyse the internet by taking into account the interplay between the device and its variety of uses. This is what she calls the 'generative process of technology' (p. 134), where the internet is interpreted as a system that has inscribed on it what can be done by users, due its design. However this is not completely stable: on the contrary, it can be changed in the process of use. This approach goes one step further in the domestication approach, as it focuses on how the technology is appropriated by taking into account how the particularity of use – which is based on the everyday life of the user - shapes the device. As will be discussed shortly, one of the methodological challenges of domestication is to be able to focus on both aspects - users and devices - without getting distracted either by the materiality of the technology (e.g. describing in too much detail the computer, the internet, the location, among other things) or the social context where domestication happens. Yet through this framework Bakardjieva tackles the core of the theory by giving both the device and the meaning a relevant place in her narrative. This is done mainly by recognising the agency of users, whom she describes as an active force that through social-biographical situations gives rise to different uses of the internet or 'specific little behaviour genres' (p.134). Therefore she puts users at the centre of her research, characterising them and giving space for them to explain their current life situations. In other words, to understand their genres of use she starts by looking at the users rather than the technology. Though this is not new in the core of domestication theory, her main contribution is to achieve it

empirically, being able to grasp the social and cultural components of her participants' lives. This is key to later aligning their everyday lives with their interpretations and different uses of the technology.

Furthermore, in her study Bakardjieva also includes immigrants. Although these participants are educated immigrants who are neither in a position of vulnerability (economically or otherwise) nor new to the internet, it is interesting to see how people from countries as different as Armenia, Germany, Bulgaria and some parts of Africa, all of whom have moved to Canada, share a single concept of this technology. As is to be expected there is a pattern of connection to their home countries through media consumption and family and friends communication that is found, despite the particularities of each of the cases. Therefore to read online newspapers, to hear radio programs, and to be in touch by email are among the practices encountered that, in Bakardjieva's interpretation, go beyond the expansion of earlier practices, positioning the internet as a 'cultural and political technology providing them with the means for preserving an important side of their identities' (p.125). This highlights that when analysing the role of a technology in the everyday, and particularly from a domestication point of view, it is necessary to be not technologically centred but user centred in order to grasp its meaning.

Another relevant contribution is a research looking at computer classes for disadvantaged populations in Dublin and Amsterdam (Hynes and Rommes, 2006). Here is analysed appropriation by users who lack both resources and technological expertise. This project sheds light on a more problematic context in a public setting such as a computer class, and invites us to reflect on the challenges posed by the internet as a technology, given its interactivity and ubiquity (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006). When putting together these elements this research becomes a useful example because it focuses on a population that to some extent had not developed these skills prior to the course - similar to some of my participants.

In their theoretical review, Hynes and Rommes (2006) point out that one of the weaknesses of domestication is that it ignores this diversity of users. Attention should be paid to 'age, gender, ethnicity and educational background … as it is the gendered configuration of resources that influences our capacity to domesticate a new technology' (p. 127). Nonetheless I also subscribe to the idea that users' contexts and life stories should be at the centre of the research; what I do not completely share is this criticism that domestication entirely ignores users. Though earlier formulations of the theory did provide some indications that the device was the relevant actor, the first studies also devoted research space to explaining how the social aspects of users shaped their technological appropriations, for example the cohort analysis conducted by Silverstone and Haddon (1996) or even the more recent example of Bakardjieva's (2005) research. Yet the point

made by Hynes and Rommes is still worthy of note because, as previously discussed, the methodological challenge of the theory is to give enough attention to both the device and the context of the users. This is particularly relevant because, as they argue, if these aspects are scrutinised more closely, this may prove useful for understanding how a technology is domesticated and why that might fail to happen, and at which specific stage of the process.

From an empirical standpoint, to know who the users are is crucial to presenting the internet as something meaningful for their everyday reality. Hynes and Rommes (2006) describe the use of a bottom-up approach when creating these courses, providing "opportunities to participants to shape or construct their own personal interpretation of the technology through use" (p.141). This implies not only collecting students' demographic details, but getting a sense of their backgrounds, day-to-day lives, aims and interests, as well as encouraging them to use their own experiences and agency to make sense of technology[5]. These introductory courses highlight new elements, external to the class, which have a predominant influence on the construction of meaning and domestication of the technology (Hynes and Rommes, 2006). This conclusion supports one of the arguments of my thesis, which concerns the relevance of users' own contexts and previous experiences.

The contribution of the authors to the theory lies in their recognition of the students as people - beyond just "users" - that is, acknowledging their interests as well as their social context, as a way of creating a bottom-up approach that facilitates the appropriation of the internet as a meaningful technology. Nonetheless, one pitfall of the study is that the authors rely very much on analysis of the device, rather than of content. This lack of reflection on the message and therefore on the internet as a medium also exemplifies one of the aspects of the theory that is most difficult to grasp: the idea of double articulation, which in the case of new media adds a new level of complexity. The theory pins down routines, spaces and materiality, but equally does not dismiss content, which is captured in the double articulation. It involves the more intangible part of the process, presenting unavoidable challenges for the application of this theoretical framework to digital media. As Hartmann (2006) points out:

> It is striking that the second articulation is primarily present in the analysis of the broadcast media, while the interpersonal medium and the multiple medium (the computer) are primarily analysed on the level of the object and the routines … it

[5] I stress this point because it is something I experienced myself when conducting fieldwork in computer classes, which led me to agree with the students that on this kind of course the internet could be presented as something alien with no real relevance for their realities, or alternatively as a familiar technology, like others that they were already familiar with, which might be of help and interest.

> underlines, yet again, that the transfer of the double articulation idea is not straightforward when it comes to interpersonal and networked media. (Hartmann 2006, p. 91)

When studying the internet in domestic spaces, one of the most recurrent points of entry is the computer[6] (Lee, 1999; Ward 2005, 2006). It is also the most obvious, since it embodies the materiality of the technology, though it does not imply that computers are analysed only in their material form and not in their cultural form, replete with symbolic meanings (Lally, 2002). However it tends to focus the analysis on the device rather than on the content, making it difficult to grasp the double articulation (Hartmann, 2006; Mackay, 2004). This could be because domestication was intended to move from textual analysis through to a focus on context, systematically shadowing the necessary analysis of the texts, which results in content being left in second or sometimes a non-existent place (Haddon, 2006a). Even in the early days of the theory, researchers encountered problems with this. For example, Miller's essay on the soap opera *The Young and the Restless*, reflects extensively on how Trinidadians appropriated the show as part of their own culture in a global vs. local dialectical encounter (Miller, 1992). However, the role of television as a material entity is of no significance in his analysis (Carrier, 1993). Hirsch's chapter in the same book (1992) presents the opposite case, exploring how communication devices such as a telephone or a computer were domesticated in a house in North London, and giving almost no attention to their media characteristics or content (Carrier, 1993).

Similarly in the internet domestication research previously discussed (Hynes and Rommes, 2006) a good part of the study is devoted to encounters with the physical device. Nonetheless, they notice how symbolic aspects have different relevance at different stages of domestication, the authors somehow ignore that appropriation also takes account of content, so when discussing this representation of technology, the image not only of computers but also of the internet is relevant, and therefore new technology discourses should also be considered. There are two ways to interpret students' failure to domesticate computers. The first is to focus, as these authors do, on access, incorporating premises about the participants' socioeconomic status and their lack of the economic capacity needed to purchase the technology. Another approach is to give predominance to the double articulation, to analyse the internet both as a social discourse and as a medium, and to question whether the failure of incorporation can be

[6] A good example of a different approach is the study conducted by Miller and Slater in Trinidad (2000), which stands out in terms of how they studied internet penetration from a holistic perspective rather than focusing on the device.

explained solely by the lack of the device or because the content was not appropriated or was not compelling enough for its domestication to be pursued.

There is also the issue of how the content actually related to their interests and, coming back to the idea of social context, how relevant this was. If, for example, they learnt how to look at news from their own country *but* they were not usually interested in this kind of reading, this was still not something they would do on a daily basis. When Hynes and Rommes (2006) claim that in their study 'it was possible to construct an understanding of how attending an IT course was influential in the way the technological artefact was further domesticated' (p. 140), they are referring not only to the internet, but also to the computer. The internet cannot be domesticated if the access device has not previously been 'tamed'.

This is a challenge of the theory and an invitation to focus on the device as well as on the content. Empirically it also offers challenges, because some content in particular may be a private aspect of technology use and perhaps more difficult to discuss in an interview, or more intrusive to observe in an ethnographic study[7]. Is it possible, then, to think about the internet simply as the software, the content? Or is it also the access point, which is part of the context and as important as the content? Should domestication scholars define the internet prior to analysis as the device or as the content, or should it always be seen as both? These are some of the questions I came across when reviewing the literature, and also when using this theoretical approach.

Here the reflections of Miller and Slater (2000) gain importance, because it incorporates both aspects of the technology, as well the practices that surround it[8]. In one of his last reviews of the theory and its concepts, Silverstone (2006) picked up the issues raised by articulations over time, reminding us that the concept originally attempted to address "the distinct nature and function of information and communications technologies in the social and cultural environments of the household" (p. 239). He stressed the idea of the symbolic meaning of a particular technology within the household and how ICTs contribute to the everyday. Nonetheless, the boundaries of place continue to be predominant, and context is limited to this specific space, leaving content aside.

[7] It is one thing to observe the situation in which someone answers a mobile phone, another to ask them to reproduce the conversation or to allow the researcher to record the content of a text message. The same may apply to internet use: "When do you access your email?" is a much simpler question than "May I please read your email?" Nonetheless, the double articulation, as formulated at the origin of domestication, requires researchers to ask both these questions.

[8] It is worth noticing that they are very much influenced by Actor Network Theory and by Latour's work based on the premise that material and immaterial elements share an equal level of agency.

#### 2.1.4.1. Women domesticating the internet

The nuances of the household space and organisation are of great interest for domestication scholars and in the analysis of gender roles, since these influence the take-up and use of new technologies within the family (Silverstone et al., 1990). It was noted that there was a division between artefacts that were considered - from the point of view of design and social understanding - as being for women and those that were for men. Even when using the same artefacts, there was a gendered pattern, for example in television viewing styles, selection of programmes and so forth (1990). The main argument is that ICTs, although considered "new", somehow reinforce "old" gendered configurations (p. 70). Silverstone et al. (1990) analyse the role of mothers and how they rely on other family members in order to make use of certain technologies, noting that the individuals studied have already mastered complicated technological systems, but lack confidence when approaching what is considered a "male device"[9] (p. 71).

To address gender as a cultural construction (Haddon, 2004), it is crucial to situate the role of women or men in a particular context and in how their roles are constructed, considering that this varies from culture to culture. It is then possible to give a more nuanced account of the domestic space, contextualising it on a macro level, rather than focusing on the specificity of the families or users studied. Domestication researchers gave more attention to devices and how these articulate with gender from a technological point of view. For example, Brandth (1994) explored the mutual shaping process of gender and technology, focusing on the role of tractors and the construction of femininity and masculinity among Norwegian farmers. Her colleague Chabaud-Rychter (1995) studied how designers, when constructing kitchen appliances, perceived women as users. An exception would be the project of Cockburn (1992), which used the production of microwave ovens as an entry point for looking at gender identities, power dynamics and technology. Livingstone (1992) conducted one on domestic technologies and family relations. There, women and men were shown to have appropriated the same devices, but understood them differently. For example, the telephone had an emotional meaning for women and a more functional meaning for men, stressing the idea that different gender roles led to different meanings of the artefact[10].

[9] They also focus on the telephone, which at that time was considered crucial for women as a way of organising the functioning of the household, but mostly as a way of coping with their isolation.
[10] This aspect is of particular importance methodologically speaking and has led researchers to choose participants for their gender specificity in order to enrich the analysis of their understandings of technologies as linked to their roles.

Habib and Conford (2002) researched domestication of home computers from a gender perspective. They argue that, although the domestic is usually seen as a place "for values associated with the family and in particular with 'the feminine'" (pp. 159-160), they struggled to find major differences across gender with regard to commitment to the domestic. Although domestication involved practices that differed among various family members, there were no gender patterns in their appropriation. This is a conclusion that does not necessarily subscribe to the idea of gender proposed by Silverstone in the original approach, which holds the different gender roles to be culturally conceived and therefore translated into family dynamics. However, it raises an interesting point about the diversity of elements that should be taken into account when studying appropriation, and the need to avoid narrow perspectives and fixed gender narratives. In the same paper, the authors also make an important remark, suggesting that "interest, knowledge and previous experiences with computers and other technologies" (p. 172) should be considered in the analysis. This is very much relevant to my study with Latinas given the diversity of their life stories and backgrounds. This approach also supports Haddon's (1998) argument that when focusing exclusively on gender, crucial aspects of context are usually missed.

#### 2.1.4.2. Non-domestication studies on gender and the internet

As gender literature has pointed out, women are usually at a disadvantage when accessing and using ICTs. One of the many arguments to explain this situation is that as gender and technology are both socially constructed, technological design has inevitably embedded power relations and inequalities between genders (Wajcman, 2004). Therefore in a male dominated industry such as ICTs, women have fewer chances to be part of the design and development of technical devices (Ribak, 2001; Bakardjieva, 2006). Yet this is not the only reason why women are usually left behind, as gender differences have been traced to other inequalities related to socioeconomic status (Ono, 2003) as well as religious and cultural constraints that restrict their access to and use of technologies (Choudhury, 2009). Women need to overcome socio-cultural barriers as well, such as lack of literacy, unfamiliarity with dominant languages such as English, and domestic responsibilities, among others (Cabrera-Balleza, 2006). One of the few comparative studies on the subject conducted in developing countries (Hilbert, 2011) also shows that access to ICTs in women was hampered by adverse conditions of employment, education and income. The research used data sets from 2005 to 2008 from 12 countries in Latin America and 13 in Africa. Interestingly, it was also found that when these inequalities disappeared women tended to be more active digital users and embrace digital technologies more enthusiastically than their male counterparts (Hilbert, 2011). These findings refute early assumptions that indicate that men tend to be more interested in technologies than women (Ono,

2003), yet it does not erase the fact that technology early adopters are predominantly men (Liff, Sheperd, Wacjman, Rice and Hargittai, 2004; Wajcman 2007). It also shows how there has been progress since initial research that established women's negative attitudes to technology, which led to them having less digital experience (Morahan-Martin, 1998). These findings were supported by reports on husbands and children having priority in computer and internet use (Ribak, 2001; Bakardjieva, 2006). Early studies on the subject have also shown that the home is a significantly less likely point of access for women than for men, adding pressure to become users (Bird and Jorgenson, 2002; Liff et al, 2004). For example, in families in Ireland a vertical relationship was found, produced by male expertise and women's inexperience with the internet, and although men were keen to teach them, women refused to put themselves in an inferior position, reinforcing gendered divisions (Rommes, 2002). Figures also show that during the decade from the mid-1990s men were online significantly more than women. Although this difference started to disappear in the subsequent decade (Mossberger, Tolberts and Stansbury, 2003; Helsper 2010), women continued to be at a disadvantage in the online arena, as they have fewer opportunities to use the internet as well as lower intensity use (Ono, 2003), resulting in differences in breadth of use, confidence and skills (Dutton, Helsper and Gerber, 2009; Hargittai and Shafer 2006; Helsper, 2010; Li and Kirkup, 2007). What this body of research points out is (a) that the extent to which women use the internet is not a fixed reality; on the contrary it is a dynamic one that has a tendency to put technological differences aside, particularly when other kinds of inequalities have been dealt with. And (b) that it is still a context-specific issue, and though there are patterns that can be drawn there is a risk in classifying women as subjects who are either scared of or not interested in using technology, and are therefore passive victims of gender inequalities. I call attention to both points because these are also the basis for arguing that the internet is a constructed device, which is to say that women shape it according their needs, capabilities and expectations by using the social, cultural and economic resources they have on hand, and by exercising their agency.

This agency can be grasped from other qualitative studies of women who face vulnerabilities yet work towards becoming digitally included. There are two pieces of research that can exemplify this point and that are in close proximity with my own subject of study. The first looks at internet adoption in households in Bangladesh, where there is a persisting gender inequality that goes beyond technological means (Choudhury 2009). The women in this study were from different socioeconomic groups yet experienced similar severe disadvantages. These also permeated their experience when accessing and using the internet. They were also immersed in a patriarchal culture that dominated the subjects' households, which meant that the men of the family (father, husband, son) were the ones who initiated and predominated internet use at home. Despite these cultural and financial constraints, Choudhury (2009) found aspects

that gave some signs of positive changes in the near future, such as that there were an increasing number of older and younger women accessing the internet. Furthermore those from upper socioeconomic cohorts showed almost no difference from men in their degree of access at home.

Reports have also shown how differently women experience ICTs, depending on whether they are mothers and/or workers, whether they have a partner, and according to their life stage (Burke, 2001; Consalvo and Paasonen, 2002). For example it has been found that women with children are more likely to consider ICTs as an educative resource (Bird and Jorgenson, 2002), and that the internet is used for enhancing relationships with children (Bakardjieva, 2005, 2006). This was illustrated by a second qualitative study conducted on women attending beginners' computer and internet classes in a city in West Virginia which is characterised as one of the poorest in the US, with high levels of rurality and segregation (Goh, 2013). Here participants were open about their perceptions of feeling excluded and inadequate as well as conscious of their digitally marginalised positions. Yet they sought to avoid becoming socially excluded, particularly in their roles of parents and caregivers. Their main motivation to attend classes was to gain internet literacy, which was seen as a tool 'they deem necessary to enhance their mothering role, strengthen family ties and communicate with their children' (Goh, 2013, p.1036). They aimed to be able to help their children with their homework, to parent effectively and to improve communication with extended and widespread family members. Furthermore, they hoped to improve their jobs prospects and gain financial independence. Though these women are not similar to my participants, they shared similarities that are worthy of note, for example their strong feelings of isolation. In this case they felt isolated because of the heavy domestic responsibilities that rarely allowed them to leave the house during the day, and similarly to the participants in my study they cherished the opportunity to attend to classes, as a way 'to get away from the daily grind of their lives' (p. 1032) and to socialise with peers. Both the studies of the Bangladeshi households and internet adoption, and that of women from disadvantaged cohorts attending community computer and internet classes show that the landscape of women in the digital arena, though imbalanced, is a dynamic field where changes can be made even though these do not address patriarchal dominance or other kinds of inequality.

Despite the risk of generalisation and comparison between very different groups (Helsper, 2010; 2011) and sociocultural contexts, another stream of the literature has aimed to address women's use, claiming that they are more inclined than men to maintain interpersonal communication and thus use the internet to achieve it (Jackson, Ervin, Gardner and Schmitt, 2001; Martey, 2010). For example, that they are more likely than men to visit social network sites, use email

and chat (Baym, Zhang, Kunkel, Ledbetter, Mei-Chen, 2007). Family contact, particularly with distant relatives and friends, has also being flagged up as a motivation for use (Rice, 2004; Ward, 2005). However this is an aspect that also needs to be closely examined, because it encompasses different gradations of use and engagement, as Kang's (2012) ethnographic research shows. He studied young, professional, Chinese first-generation migrants in London for the period of one year and observed international communication with their parents and close family in China. Though gender differences in digital skills were almost nonexistent among respondents, there was a gender gap to be found in the skills of their parents in China, since the male of the family was usually the one who had more digital skills. The author found three patterns among the ageing mothers in China: (a) those who have absolutely no communication with their children due their lack of digital skills and knowledge; (b) those that looked for assistance, i.e. help from other family members to stay in touch, although their communication depended upon on-going external support, which led to a lack of autonomy and independence when communicating; (c) empowerment among mothers that sought help outside the family, in their extended social networks, and worked to build digital skills in formal and informal educational environments. To sum up, this research, as well as the growing body of literature on gender and internet use, shows that even though there are certain patterns that can be drawn and specific outcomes which can be expected (such as that women are more interested in interpersonal communication than men), the context specificity of each case, and the resources each user has to hand, differs enormously. Therefore these optimistic trends are encouraging, but what is relevant is to analyse these claims in the light of empirical data. Even though generalisation is not possible, these will show the nuances of the technological paths and unveil social and cultural aspects that are crucial when understanding women's context. Such is the case of elderly women in China, mothers in West Virginia in the US or women in Bangladeshi households. This diversity of contexts, aims and outcomes feeds the argument that the internet is a context-specific construction, which changes over time and is in accordance with people's aims and resources.

## 2.2 Internet appropriation and the role of contexts

Although devices provide standardised functions, they are not generic tools. How they are domesticated is linked to people's histories and social locations (Nelson, Tu and Hines, 2001). This is the premise for the claim that each user creates his own internet because of its scope for interaction and wide range of possibilities; hence it means different things for different people (Anderson and Tracey, 2001; Selwyn et al 2005). It is neither a single nor a given device (Hine, 2000). It can be perceived as the artefact that someone requires for their work, or for others as a "window on the world", as one of my participants described it. This theoretical approach, plus a

lengthier empirical research study in Trinidad, led Miller and Slater (2000) to formulate their iconic definition of the internet as a "range of practices, software and hardware technologies, modes of representation and interaction (…)" (p.14). This starting point throws out of the window technological determinism paradigms where technologies are standardised, with a clear evolution, and merely "adopted".

Its usage is not passive; on the contrary, its meaning is constructed on the everyday and fed by peoples' beliefs, expectations, experiences and networks, and most importantly rooted in their social and cultural context (Anderson and Tracey, 2001; Hine, 2000; Miller and Slater, 2000; Selwyn et al., 2005). Technological understandings emerge from local conceptions (Leaning, 2005), giving the leading role to users and their contexts rather than to the devices as such. Users take what they consider suitable, what makes sense for them, making use of their own understandings of society, resources and cultural codes.

Social constructivism – and particularly Social Construction of Technology - reflects on the wider society within which technologies are developed and the societal power structures within which they are situated (Lie and Sørensen, 1996; Pinch, Bijker and Hughes, 1987; Kline and Pinch, 1999). SCOT makes explicit the power relations between social groups because it situates the development of ICTs within contingency and human choices (Bakardjieva, 2005; Winner, 1993). Through its concept of interpretative flexibility, it suggests that 'technology design is an open process that can produce different outcomes depending on the social circumstances of development' (Klein and Kleiman, 2002, p. 29). Although the focus is on the moment when technologies are designed and developed, it enriches the picture of why and how ICTs acquire different meanings and uses (Kline and Pinch, 1999; Winner, 1993).

Technologies are possibilities for action: "artefacts which may be both shaped by and shaping of the practices humans use in interaction with, around and through them" (Hutchby, 2001, p. 444). These affordances[11] highlight the ways in which not all objects offer the same range of possibilities to everyone because these are rooted in an individual's environment and characteristics (2001), underlining that it is their own sense-making which should prevail. For example, Madianou and Miller (2012) explore it through the concept of polymedia. They argue that among a multitude of options provided by the new media, people evaluate them regarding each other, selecting the aspects they consider appropriate for different circumstances and stressing that attention should be given to "how they [users] exploit what they find to be

[11] The concept was originally developed by followers of ANT and a semiotic approach to technology (Sorensen, 2004): "These ideas resonated well with designer guru Donald A. Norman's suggestion that artefacts could be considered as *affordances* related to human action, a mixture of suggestions and facilitations with regard to how design should or should not be used" (p. 5-6)

significant differences and possibilities among plurality of the media" (p. 104). This line of argument highlights the agency that is involved in the process of technology shaping and use, as well as how context is essential when assessing the role of a particular media.

Therefore what technology can offer is not apparent and available in advance; its "meaningfulness does not exist before the uses themselves" (Hine, 2000, p. 29). Similar devices give rise to different understandings according to different users and contexts. So it is possible to discuss how, although there is one technological device called the internet, in reality we might talk of *internets,* in the plural, embracing the diversity of meanings and constructions that emerge from this. This supports the idea of explorative and qualitative research that helps to overcome the claims of technological and media determinism in ICTs consumption studies (Berker et al., 2006).

Technologies are appropriated within the daily setting involving social and material features where practices are developed and embedded (Nelson et al., 2001; Mehra et al., 2004; Rasmussen, 2000). Actions are not shaped in isolation, but are linked to practices, spaces and structures where technologies take part and change practices as well as these technologies (Silverstone et al, 1992; Rasmussen, 2000). These are among the analytical tools that provide the boundaries of the space where appropriation is situated (Bakardjieva, 2006). Mobility and the convergence of technologies extend the scope of daily life beyond the household and enriched the environment within which they acquire meaning, but also make it more difficult to capture (Bakardjieva, 2006).

Indeed, the everyday is the connections between different spheres of a person's life, their activities at work, home and leisure (Lie and Sørensen, 1996). Patterns and change, dynamics and controversies are part of the picture, as is the transnationalisation of the household in the case of migrants. These elements have a role in the appropriation of technologies and ultimately in the distinctive digital engagement of individuals in a social context and, more privately, in the household. Nonetheless, caution is needed because technologies are a catalyst for change, but, as Lie and Sørensen (1996) point out, "we need to modify our notion (...) perceiving everyday life to be not so stable and technology not so revolutionary" (p. 3). To study appropriation is a constant balancing act between changing domestic dynamics and shaping of technologies. How the internet is constructed constitutes a representation of a specific moment where these two forces intersect, but later this might change again under new domestic circumstances and/or technological settings.

### *2.2.1 Culture and the construction of the internet*

In order to function and make sense, technologies must be culturally appropriate (Sørensen et al., 2000). A cultural lens is then needed in order to read technologies and contribute to finding them a place in the everyday. Culture is difficult to grasp, but it could be addressed from an identity point of view. A person's life is a journey full of events, associations, belonging, places, people, relationships and so forth. Each of these leaves a trail in the self that becomes part of one's identity. It is not determined by biology, but historically, in a process of constant change, with different identities at different stages of life. There is a diversity of roles that people adopt according to contexts and circumstances (Hall, 1990, 1992). Ethnicity is central to cultural identity because it comprises a person's history, language and culture (Hall, 1988; Gillespie, 1995). Hall (1990) also stresses that identity is constituted through a positioning which is always in conflict and never completed. Change, differences and contradictions are components of identity, speaking about people's attachments and belonging. For example, in a study of migrant Filipina mothers, the women presented clashing roles as caregivers, heroines and exploited workers, which led to identity conflicts and a constant negotiation of discourses and practices (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Madianou and Miller, 2012). As Georgiou (2006) argues:

> Identity has to do as much with positioning one-self within a specific culture, following particular codes and practices, as it has to do with shaping a sense of belonging through appropriating and adopting the self and cultural discourses. As identities are not fixed and stable, they allow people to rediscover and redefine their content, not through an exclusive gaze to the past, but with a parallel focus on present experience and on the future of transformation and change (Georgiou, 2006, p. 40).

As an unfinished process, these different identities become the starting point for new forms of identification, highlighting its dynamic and always changing nature, which have led to thinking about identity as a "becoming" (Hall 1990, p.225).

Cultural identity is also a dynamic concept in which history has a role to play, as it does in what makes one group different from another, rather than similar (1990). As history does not stop there is no stable cultural identity determined by a static history. However, individuals do position themselves "within the narratives of the past" (p. 225) as well as within belongings and communities of reference that provide them with codes for interpreting the world. Although dynamic, there is still a common *language* and common references that are shared by communities and that differentiate them from others, such as religion, language, speech

patterns, values, social orientations and beliefs, which enhance the identification and boundaries (Berthoud et al,1997; Buckingham, 2008; Hall, 2003; Kim, 1998).

These cultural understandings provide lenses that help individuals to interpret alien codes and settings, and are essential for assessing the intricacies of differences between individuals from specific communities and their technological practices (Bird and Jorgenson, 2002; Georgiou, 2005; Leung, 2005). In the context of this research they help to illuminate how Latinas make use of their own cultural codes in their engagement with the internet. As D'Haenens (2003) points out:

> Cultural identity defines culture as a source of belonging and continuity, an intersubjective system of symbols that offers a framework for interpreting daily social reality and providing it with meaning (p. 410).

ICTs transport messages from the media that help people to find social meanings and agreements through representations (Hall 1990; Georgiou 2006). Media provide cultural references that feed the identity construction process (Morley and Robins, 1995), as well as enabling it to be altered in a process of cultural transformation (de Leeuw and Rydin, 2007). Although tempting, it is not advisable to describe online practices solely in terms of national borders, to refer exclusively to activities as related to the users' country of origin or to their new country of residence, since the internet is a heterogeneous place where spaces as well as these categories merge. Consequently, their identities are also a reflection of this, creating "symbolic spaces … a hybrid identity articulation which transcends the binary 'homeland' and 'new land'" (Bailey, Georgiou and Harindranath, 2007, p.6). This leads to a new theoretical hazard that makes it somehow impossible to define clear limits to cultural identity, supporting the idea that these Latinas are immersed in an 'in-between' culture (Bhabha, 1996), a process where interpretation and negotiation occur in a 'third space' with cultural and language heterogeneity (Bhabha, 1994; Lutz, 2011). This is not an easy terrain to explore, as clearly formulated by Werbner (1997):

> How are we to make sense of such claims when the very concept of culture disintegrates at first touch into multiple positionings, according to gender, age, class, ethnicity, and so forth? As culture evaporates into a war of positions, we are left wondering what it might possibly mean to "have" a cultural "identity" (p.3).

Cultural identity poses challenges that are necessary for understanding the intricacies of the cultural interpretations and appropriation of technologies. One way of tackling this is through its

hybridity, which is similar to the notion of the in-between, but addresses the competing aspects of borders and identities that arise from their union[12]. Miller and Slater (2000) touch on this by identifying the 'expansive potential' of the internet. They claim it provides a space for the performance of values, practices and identities, allowing individuals to "envisage a quite novel vision of what one could be" (p.11). This is not a process where only *new* identities are born, but that, on the contrary, the internet "could be seen by many as *primarily* a means of repairing those allegiances" (p.18; emphasis in original) which enhance older identities in terms of religion, national affiliation or family. In the case of Latinas, since identities and spaces arise from their current marginalisation and detachment from the mainstream, it is possible to assume they mainly choose channels and messages linked to their roots, without giving much space to this competition of cultures and feeding their Latino identity.

### *2.2.2 Internet access and use among disadvantaged populations*

Technology as a social construction is embedded in a structure, and open to interpretation by different groups and according to their context (Winner, 1993). This reflects the complexities of the appropriation of a device, highlighting how when it was designed it was inscribed with the interpretations and agreements of the predominant social groups (Pinch et al, 1987; Sørensen et al 2000). Therefore being a minority is an issue in technology design, as choices are made without considering social groups that are neither relevant nor influential (Klein and Kleiman, 2002). It follows from the notion of cultural interpretations and their role in appropriation that these designs pose difficulties for minorities and for the disadvantaged, hampering the process of appropriation for those considered to lack economic and knowledge resources, and also for those from different cultures (Leung, 2005; Rice and Haythornthwaite, 2006; Wyatt, Henwood, Miller and Senker, 2000).

This link between vulnerable populations and technologies has been discussed extensively (see Chen and Wellman, 2003; Cho, Zuñiga, Rojas and Shah, 2003; Hargittai, 2002; Helsper, 2008, 2011, 2012; Norris, 2001; Warschauer, 2004). Usually minorities and migrants are considered to be among those marginalised from society (Anthias, 2001; Berthoud et al 1997; Healey, 2006) and have therefore drawn the attention of digital inclusion initiatives for the last decade, particularly in Europe (see Communities and Local Government, 2008; FreshMinds, 2007; Ofcom, 2008; SEEDA, 2007; Selwyn and Gorard, 2002; UK Online Centres, 2008). Originally the focus was in terms of access to technologies and infrastructure (Helsper, 2011). Despite the extensive discussion about the level of effectiveness and the outcomes of these programmes, the

[12] Grossberg (1996) identifies it as "subaltern identities as existing between two competing identities" (p. 91)

key point is that there, technology was considered a tool for achieving social inclusion. This is indeed problematic because of the assumption of linear and, to some extent, automatic correspondence between internet usage, improvements in quality of life and ultimately in position within society (Chen and Wellman, 2003; Green and Haddon, 2009; Thomas and Wyatt, 2000).

Scholars in the field have fiercely disputed it, arguing that social exclusion is a broad and multidimensional concept that encompasses economic, material, political, cultural and social aspects (Levitas, Pantazis, Fahmy, Gordon, Lloyd and Patsios, 2007; Taket, Crisp, Nevill, Lamaro, Graham and Barter-Godfrey, 2009). Therefore its causes - and certainly its solutions - go beyond technological fixes (Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; Cammaerts, 2003; Haddon, 2000; Wyatt et al 2000). Yet it remains a debated area because though it is unreasonable to expect that social inequalities will be eliminated through newer and user-friendly technologies (Klecun, 2008; Couldry, 2007), evidence has shown that the role that technologies can potentially play in people's lives should not be dismissed. This is why attention has been given to the ways in which disadvantaged groups appropriate and experience technology from a social inclusion/exclusion point of view (Berker et al., 2006; Haddon, 2000; Selwyn and Facer, 2007; Selwyn and Gorard, 2002; Silverstone, 2005; Clark, 2003).

It is also important to consider that from a socioeconomic perspective, low levels of education lead to expectations of less access and experience with technology. This might prevent an early development of digital competence, which in combination with a deprived environment and limited social networks may have adverse impacts on their practices (DiMaggio et al., 2004; Murdock and Golding, 2004; Warschauer, 2004; Van Dijk, 2006). Paraphrasing Bakardjieva (2005), the internet as an extension of the self or as an artificial device which is difficult to use, and the different gradations between these extremes, depend on skills, social support and motivations, among other things (DiMaggio and Hargittai, 2001; van Dijk, 2005; Warschauer, 2004). This view emphasises that to understand how people behave online we first need to explore how their reality is compounded. For example, Helsper (2012) explores the correspondence between online and offline fields by identifying economic, cultural, social and personal resources. There she identifies ethnicity among the categories that are linked to different sources of cultural resources and therefore different understandings (2012).

As mentioned earlier, gender too could have a negative influence. For example, early research shows that in the EU women are less educated than men, have fewer opportunities to work with computers and therefore lack experience and technological abilities (Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2003). These characteristics are likely to be more patent in women from ethnic minorities

(Consalvo and Paasonen 2002; Oudshoorn and Pinch, 2003; Mossberger et al., 2003), and particular in those with low income (Wasserman and Richmond-Abbott, 2005).

Nonetheless minorities are not victims in in their relationship with technologies (Nelson et al., 2001; Kolko, Nakamura and Rodman, 1999; Nakamura, 2002). Scholars have contested the idea that minority status is synonymous with technophobia and assert that these kinds of arguments have led to ethnicity being linked with the lack of a "productive relationship with technology" (Nelson et al., 2001). They adhere to arguments based on different interpretations and uses of technologies in these communities. However the terrain is complex and blurred because many in this population also share socioeconomic disadvantages, which make them more likely to be digitally excluded. Yet perceptions of technophobia are very much present, as illustrated by Gomez-Peña (2001):

> The mythology goes like this. Mexicans (and other Latinos) can't handle high technology. Caught between a preindustrial past and an imposed postmodernity, we continue to be manual beings - homo fabers par excellence, imaginative artisans (not technicians) ... We are perceived as sentimental and passionate, meaning irrational; and when we decide to step out of our realm and utilize high technology in our art (...), we are meant to repeat what others have already done (p.195).

One considerable advance in the literature has been recognition of how people, vulnerable or not, make use of the resources they have available in order to digitally connect. Particular needs and interests must be part of the understanding of "inclusion", bearing in mind whether people can use technologies in a way that is relevant to them. Hence scholars have affirmed the importance of considering people's aims and environments when assessing their gradations of inclusion (Bure, 2005; Helsper, 2008; Livingstone and Helsper, 2007; Selwyn and Facer, 2007). The focus should be on how online practices are entangled in the particularities of their daily lives, what is meaningful, interesting and what aspect of the internet – or construction of it - helps them to achieve their objectives (Helsper, 2011; Mehra and Merkel 2004, p. 799). To understand that process we should explores people's resources, motivations, social networks and contexts as they shape their own construction of the technologies and their engagement with them.

Though generalisations among groups are best avoided, a major pitfall is the lack of knowledge about vulnerable groups and how they digitally engage - or fail to - and which elements support their inclusion into ICTs (Helsper, 2011). The literature has advanced enough to leave behind assumptions such as that connectivity automatically leads to technological inclusion. The need to include social, cultural and economic contexts into the analysis has now been recognised.

More importantly, that there is no single best way to make use of online resources but several, according to the diversity of aims and circumstances. What is missing, then, is empirical research into the specificity of these groups and their everyday lives to appreciate to what extent the internet is present and what role it plays in their experience.

## 2.3 Transnational migrants: beyond the boundaries of the home

One of the theoretical challenges that I face as a researcher is to address concepts and frameworks that help me to account for the meaningful experiences of participants, particularly those that are related to their everyday life as migrants. This is why I aim to incorporate views that are not directly technology-driven, but nonetheless have an impact on these women's internet domestication processes. These concepts and theoretical perspectives are best approached by both transnational and migration literature.

Transnationalism is a concept that gained the attention of scholars in the field in 1992 when Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc defined it as 'the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement' (p.1). The authors refer to social, political and economic ties among networks of migrants which involve the host and home societies (Schiller et al 1992 in Bailey 2013). This initial approach recognises a clear link between the society of origin and the one where migrants settle (Schiller et al 1995). Yet there are other perspectives on the subject, such as that offered by Werbner (1997), where the focus of transnationalism is mainly given by the 'collective homes' of immigrants (p.12) and questions about clashing cultures, which in Werbner's view gives life to an hybridity that is negotiated and usually accompanied by social and economic burdens. Other authors, such as Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt (1999) delimited much more strictly the characteristics of those considered transnationals, by characterising them as people who speaks two languages, have homes in two countries and have regular contact across national borders. Nonetheless this is a very rigid view because it also implies that there are financial ties with the country of origin. Furthermore the authors also consider the condition of transnationalism to be dependent on the existence of occupations and activities that sustain such contact (Kelly and Lusis, 2006). In this regard Hiller and Franz (2004) provide a much looser approach by characterising transnational immigrants as those who have roots in a territory where they no longer reside, but for whom that place remains as a community of reference, which accentuates a social and cultural line. Similar is the definition proposed by Navarrete and Huerta (2006), who refer to a transnational community of immigrants as a 'dispersed group of individuals from the same nation who maintain a sense of togetherness across geographical borders' (p .2). However, when discussing

the term, different factors such as global structures of inequality and power, political representation and involvement, and identity formation, among others, cannot be dismissed (Kelly and Lusis, 2006). One of the strengths of this development is that transnationalism as a concept recognises the connections between the local, the national and the global (Georgiou, 2006):

> The transnational emphasises the possibility of development of meaningful relation and social formations across borders and through the development of dense networks (…) As such, it is particularly relevant for understanding the processes by which migrants and diasporic communities forge and sustain multistranded social relations (…) it recognises both the possibilities of networks and communities to surpass national boundaries, as well as the continuing significance of the national border (p.10)

Yet transnationalism has faced criticism over the years. Portes (2001) disagrees with notions that have made the concept too wide. He gives as examples variations such as transnationalism from above, which addresses the role of governments and corporations, and from below, which looks at actions led by immigrants (Guarnizo and Smith 1998 in Portes, 2001). According to Portes (2001) this is just one symptom of the weakness of the concept, which is way too vast and has been used without precision in very different contexts, creating confusion by its multiple meanings and by defining immigrant practices that are not necessarily part of a transnational stream[13]. Other authors have also critiqued the tendency to apply the concept to relations exclusively between host country and home country, brushing aside the evolution of the concept to include different forms of connections that go beyond this rigorous bounding (Burell and Anderson, 2008; Gielis, 2009). Boccagni (2012), on the other hand, agrees with these critiques, adding that the concept has been used simultaneously as a theoretical tool and an empirical phenomenon, which has led transnationalism to be applied 'to nearly all migrant social practices' (p.119). As a consequence, the author points out, the everyday life of migrants remains unexplored:

> (…) the transnational should be understood as a matter of situated attributes that may emerge, to different degrees and under distinct circumstances, in migrants' lives and in migration-related social formations… the transnational should indeed be understood as an adjective - that is a social attribute (or even an asset) which may apply and be enacted to different degrees (Boccagni 2012, p.128)

[13] However on the specific point of transnationalism from above/below, other authors have indicated this distinction to be a useful one because it allows one to focus on different actors, since transnationalism from below is the one that specifically addresses the everyday lives of migrants (Al-Ali and Koser 2012).

More recently authors have stressed that to maintain such links, travel between countries is not a condition, and that immigrants can still engage in an everyday life that involve familial attachments to culturally different societies (Sanchez and Salazar, 2012). This is possible through the idea of formation of networks, communities and new social spaces, rather than grounding it on the binary concept of home/host countries, with the advantage of going beyond structures of state, nation and societies (Nedelcu, 2012). This vision also incorporates the role of digital technologies in creating such networks and in sustaining transnational ties. This is why of all these approaches, the conceptualisation of transnationalism that benefits my research the most is that of Vertovec (2009), which is an updates view that acknowledges the role of ICTs in the links maintained across borders, which are not necessarily attached to one place of belonging:

> Transnationalism describes a condition in which, despite great distances and notwithstanding the presence of international borders (…), certain kinds of relationships have been globally intensified and now take place paradoxically in a planet-spanning yet common – however virtual – arena of activity (Vertovec 2009, p.3)

The advantages of subscribing to this vision of the concept is that it highlights cultural production, and it remains a more flexible approach than that presented originally by Portes et al (1999), where transnational migration 'needs to include a significant number of people engaged in sustained relations over time' (Al-Ali and Koser 2012, p.2). It is also the presence of the role of technologies that enriches this perspective, because it stresses an ever-present scheme of communication that gives life to different forms of connections and participation across borders and cultures, which also shows the internal complexity of transnational networks (Gielis, 2009; Nedelcu, 2012). This view also enables an analysis of the exigencies of the everyday, where socially constructed norms force immigrants to juxtapose and balance contradictory roles (Giralt and Bailey, 2010).

Another aspect that is relevant for this study is the role of gender in migration studies, which has a predominant place and it could be defined as socially constructed and performative (Butler, 1990, in Pavlenko, 2001). This allows the positioning of gender characteristics across cultures (Pavlenko, 2001), rather than a prescriptive idea of gender. This gives space for nuances and unique characteristics rooted in the community of reference of the subjects, and stresses the cultural construction of women that heavily influences their roles and responsibilities, as these also impact on their internet appropriation. Gender has also been

discussed as a "key category" of the migration experience, making gendered specificity a requisite for completely addressing this issue (Lutz, 2010, 2011a):

> Migrants' gender is mirrored in the different ways women and men (can) perceive their care obligations and family responsibilities, in the role that employment and income play in the process of decision-making about (e-, re- and trans-) migration, how they relate to their families, how they deal with kinship loyalties (e.g. sending remittances) and how they act and represent themselves as part of the moral economy of kin (Lutz 2011a, p. 357).

New technologies have permeated the migration and transnational arena, making it difficult to ignore their premises and contributions when the focus of study is internet construction by migrant women. A valuable contribution in the field is the research conducted by Madianou and Miller (2012). Their three years' ethnography with Filipina mothers in the UK explored how they make use of the different elements provided by the new media to undertake mothering at distance. They argue that ICTs have transformed the migration and parenting experience, supporting the idea that internet and a landline are basic tools for nurturing relationships challenged by distance. This train of thought intersects with that of migration scholars, who have also analysed how women continue their roles as mothers despite distance, and use new technologies to compensate for their absence (Lutz, 2011b).

Since the 1920s, the focus in the field of migration has been on researching how people settle in a new country rather than how they sustain contact. Change has been driven by technological developments that allow migrants to "reinforce" certain practices (Vertovec, 2009). For example, emotional ties sustained over distance, networks that enable chain migration, and communication among family members have all existed since long before the arrival of the Internet. However, new technologies have had a profound impact on the extent, intensity and speed of these relations, enabling a tight migrant network and closer contact with home (pp.14-15). This is to some extent linked to ontological security. Originally it refers to a basic instinct of certainty, which Giddens (1990) more precisely defines at:

> ...the confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action. A sense of the reliability of persons and things, so central to the notion of trust (Giddens 1990, p. 92)

This security is badly shaken in people with attachments in different places, as well as by digital

networks and communications that alter the sense of locality and community (Morley, 2006; Georgiou, 2013). These are aspects stressed in transnational and migrants' families for whom their symbolic spaces of belonging are no longer bound to a geographical place (Georgiou, 2013). In this context media offer comfort, or in Silverstone's (1994) words, a "teddy bear" (p.13). This comfort is presented by the continuity of practices and rituals in an immigration setting, either emulating traditional media or through the use of the digital media as such. These routines, so characteristic of the everyday, offer a sense of certainty in the transnational arena as objects full of meanings associated with routines and spaces of belonging (Georgiou, 2013, pp. 312-313)[14]. The internet provides the possibility to continue practices across borders or to connect with geographically distant spaces. It provides a virtual arena of connection and reconnection, transforming the sense of locality and community, broadening both geographical limits and senses of belonging (Morley 2006, p. 22)

Scholars in the field argue that new technologies, and in particular the internet, have brought a paradigmatic change in the migration process. As Schiller, Basch and Szanton Blanc (1995) reflect, previously migrants 'were forced to abandon, forget, or deny their ties to home and in subsequent generations memories of transnational connection were erased' (p. 51). Technologies of transportation and communication help to maintain their transnational links, as well as to mitigate some of migrants' struggles such as language constraints, isolation and poverty (Khvorostianov, Elias and Nimrod, 2012). Therefore technologies are also a means of coping with the potentially stressful situation of changing countries, where the loss of cultural and familiar settings have been related to "culture shock" and negative emotional reactions (Chen, 2010)[15]. The internet has been identified as crucial in migrants' process of cultural change, providing 'new tactics for mobility, [and] integration' (Diminescu, 2008, p. 571).

Language also appears in these studies, since it is linked to culture and vital for experiencing the social world (Burck 2011). Therefore Koehn and Rosenau (2002) have identified language as a skill for immigrants in "achieving analytical, emotional, imaginative, and performance competency" (p. 113). Although inability to speak the official language does not prevent

[14] Georgiou (2013) reflects on the pivotal role of satellite television for migrants and diasporic populations because it delivers a "symbolic space of belongings and a shared imagination of a hybrid transnational community" (p.308). This is a role that also could be attributed to certain online practices, for example visiting national newspapers' websites.

[15] The adjustments, expectations and changes required of migrants have been linked to depressive symptoms, particularly in those who have a strong cultural identity, as they encounter more difficulties when dealing with new traditions and surroundings (Ward and Searle, 1991)

immigrants from embarking on transnational activities, it may prevent them from being included in the mainstream (Portes et al., 1999)[16].

Although it is not completely clear how immigration may be reflected in internet practices, empirical data have led researchers to argue that time spent living abroad may be reflected in migrants' patterns of use, which tend to be determined by the host country in terms of websites visited, people communicated with and language used (Chen, 2010). However, these claims do not reflect the inequalities that migrants are usually immersed in, which sometimes hamper not only access to technology, but opportunities to develop the literacy required for mastery.

Contradictory findings from a similar study have argued that those who have spent five years abroad use the internet as a way of integrating into the host country, and also as a tool for dealing with homesickness and keeping in touch with their roots (Hiller and Franz, 2004). Therefore it is possible to argue that the new media help immigrants to adjust to the host society, but also to preserve their own cultural identity, enhancing their sense of belonging (Bailey et al., 2007; Georgiou, 2006; Hiller and Franz, 2004; Khvorostianov et al., 2011). This was explored in two studies of older immigrants who gained access to the internet after living abroad. There, it was found that this helped them to discover "lost ties", since they used it as a way of reconnecting and extending their social networks (Hiller and Franz, 2004; Khvorostianov et al., 2011). It also facilitated their research on particular interests, such as health and leisure-related topics, providing resources for coping with the difficulties presented by both their age and their immigrant situation, thus empowering them in both respects.

Other authors claim that the use of the internet in a migration context cannot be seen as confined to the creation of new and maintaining of old ties, since it also "amplified the exploratory practices that were also part of the process of migration by making digitally-mediated pieces of the rest of the world more accessible" (Burrell and Anderson, 2008 p. 204- 205). The internet is a bridge that no longer connects only two points, but an infinity of points spread around the world, making ICTs more relevant for both communication purposes and information-seeking, or, as other authors in the field have claimed, for ties that enable economic and political participation with the homeland, enhancing transnationalism on a mass scale (Portes et al., 1999; Schiller et al., 1995).

[16] Sometimes language can also undermine internet appropriation. For example, Ono and Zavodny (2008) conducted research on English skills and internet use among Latino immigrants in the US. Her findings show that if Spanish was the only language spoken in the household then internet use was considerably lower than in an English-speaking household, increasing the gap between these individuals and mainstream society. Ono and Zavodny's findings are similar to other studies of immigrants in English-speaking countries, suggesting that lack of literacy impacts on IT use (2008).

Nonetheless, perhaps the aspect of internet use most discussed in this population is the idea of communication and the links that are supported and/or created online. Hence it has usually been conceptualised as a 'bridge', a structural part of the migration experience providing a connection with the homeland as well as with the host country (Burrell and Anderson, 2008; Hiller and Franz, 2004; de Leeuw and Rydin, 2007). For example, it helps immigrants to develop new strategies for integration and access to services, "bridging" with their new home, and even serves as a point of departure, as a way of looking for information and for fellow immigrants prior to migration (Diminescu, 2008; Chen, 2010; Hiller and Franz, 2004; de Leeuw and Rydin, 2007). It also provides a new means of sustaining bonds with home countries (2007), helping migrants to maintain practices and relations despite distance in a translocal context (Greschke, 2012). This sense of proximity, the maintenance of links and the ability to communicate cheaply on a daily basis enables what Diminescu (2008) calls a "culture of bonds" that encourages migrants to embrace distance and to create virtual ties:

> … today's migrants are the actors of a *culture of bonds*, which they themselves have founded and which they maintain even as they move about. Formerly a latent feature but typical of all groups on the move, this culture of bonds became visible and highly dynamic once migrants began massively to use modern information and communication technologies (ICTs). (Diminescu, 2008, p. 567)

The maintenance of contact, culture and roots is made easier by these technologies, inviting people to move around the globe without fear of losing connection, and giving birth to a new kind of migrant, the "connected migrant" (2008). The internet can be seen as an opportunity for those experiencing a life abroad, providing a "meeting place of the private and the public, the interpersonal and the communal" (Georgiou 2002, p. 2). However, what has not yet been addressed is what kind of immigrants the scholars are referring to, since from their words it could be presumed that the immigrant they have in mind is one with particular characteristics, for whom accessing and using new technologies is not a matter of chance.

This is not just a detail in the argument; on the contrary, the presumption of technological expertise is very significant when following the migrant's technology use, approach and interpretation. For example, it is not the same to start using the internet out of need in a strange city as it is to appropriate it in a familiar city and later take advantage of the technology for the migratory process. These nuances are not usually taken into account in the literature because the focus is on a taken-for-granted use. In spite of this gap, the literature does focus on how the internet and the communication practices associated with it enhance migrants' sense of belonging and contradict their sense of being distant, enabling the creation of spaces of what

Bailey (2007) calls 'inclusion and belongingness or/and segregation". What letters and telephone conversations previously achieved has been augmented by new technologies, enabling a 'continuous presence in spite of distance' (p. 572). As a result, migrants' lives and how they settle have been transformed. As Vertovec (2009) reflects:

> What is particularly remarkable, we might add, is certainly not that migrants make use of ICT to shape their transnational lives; rather, what is of note is the way that such technologies have both enabled and fit in with the everyday nature of maintaining transnational ties, making regular – indeed, in many cases, daily - contact with family and associates overseas a routine or commonplace occurrence (Vertovec 2009, p.61).

Transnational families have the opportunity to develop a "connected relationship", valuing the internet as a channel for providing support and care to family and friends, giving the illusion of closeness and mitigating the sense of distance and loneliness, enhancing the "perception of intimate connectedness" (Wilding, 2006, p. 138) and ontological security. However it is important to mention that families have not extended their bonds because of the presence of ICTs, but are able to carry on the kind of relationships and practices they have always had and which are now hampered by distance (2006). This reminds us of the non-deterministic nature of technologies, and their limited capacity to enable communication on the terms and with the boundaries and constraints decided by the user and set by the context. The internet does not have the power to change relationships, but it can make them possible through channels of communication. In the same way, distance is not erased, but bridges can be built towards maintaining practices and traditions (2006). Nonetheless there are two sides to this argument, as the introduction of ICTs does not completely eliminate the effects of distance. On the contrary, sometimes this regular communication intensifies rather than diminishes the sense of distance (Wilding, 2006, p. 138).

This is not an easy terrain and it is possible to appreciate why, in this stream of the literature, the idea of how people use a technology is treated as more predominant or more natural than how they actually construct it. However, I would like to argue for meanings and practices that change according different contexts, and that therefore there is a particular technology and usage for these Latinas that are not necessarily the same for everyone. This also questions the idea of the "connected immigrant" as a label in terms of internet use, inviting us to problematise, rather than to make assumptions about, both users and contexts.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide a review of key concepts and existing research in the field of domestication, transnationalism and digital engagement in vulnerable and migrant populations. Technology as a culturally constructed meaning is crucial to unfolding how Latinas domesticate the internet, and to evaluating whether this makes a difference to their experience as migrants. It is a material, symbolic and social object, which, once its significance is acquired, fills the gap between design (intended meaning) and collective meaning (the kind of consensus and expectations raised). To assess how technologies acquire meaning and to what extent they alter the everyday life of users, it is necessary to deconstruct their social context and practices as migrants, as foreigners, as Latinas. This process takes place within a dialectic of change of their social world. Both social and technical elements are part of a dynamic arena where expectations, pressures, new needs and challenges frame the context of where it will be domesticated.

The geography of domestication resides in the home, or in a defined public or private place, where articulations between the public and the private take place through ICTs. The double and triple articulations are the doors through which the global and the transnational enter the intimacy of the home. It is through new technologies that migrants are able to connect with their roots and experience the clichéd but real 'end to frontiers'. However, as transnationalism points out, migrants are users with a diversity of locations, whose home is in one place while they continue connecting with media and exchanging messages from across borders. This enriches the analysis but makes it difficult to follow the practices and negotiation of meanings that give life to their own interpretation of the internet.

Domestication offers concepts and elements that enable a careful analysis of the complexities they face, as well as their trajectories, how they perceive the devices and the constant negotiations of messages. The advantage of this location-based approach is that it gives importance to the sociocultural contexts where appropriation occurs. At the same time the current transnational aspect of participants' lives obliges us to challenge the theory and to test whether moral economy and of double articulation can resist an analysis of the blurred, if not completely non-existent, geographical limits that lead to mixed cultures. The clear-cut, step-by-step concepts of public, private, household and texts serve as useful guidelines. Yet there is a risk that these will be too descriptive and not acknowledge the complexity of clashing cultures, disappearing frontiers and disadvantage within which practices and meanings are interwoven. There are two aspects that so far have not received enough attention: the cultural lens of appropriation and the transnational context. Both aspects will inform the domestication approach and help to address the nuances of the process.

The challenges are therefore (a) the links with the outside. The connection with the world is not straightforward. I am analysing people who are between cultures and societies, most of them detached from the mainstream. They do not speak the official language and are thereby marginalised. (b) They choose to be connected with a specific 'outside' defined mainly by their country of origin and/or those whose language and roots they share. Subsequently they appear to have 'located' their home in transnational territory and the messages that they negotiate are those provided by their distant home country, rather than those literally on their doorstep. Their homes appear to be in London, but the messages, articulations and negotiations are not, being digitally distant from where the household is physically located.

In migration and transnational studies, the internet has been analysed as a platform that enables communication, a paradigmatic change in the migration experience. Bridges are cemented by ICTs, helping people to maintain their roots, to be both here and there, where the community of reference is distant, yet close. This flags up how their interpretations of the world, and of technologies, are informed by their current location and by their past: hence the importance of bringing cultural aspects and hybridity into the analysis. This will help to go beyond descriptions of virtual arenas of activity and to address culturally constructed meanings of technology. Still these nuances have not been much discussed. Diminescu's 'connected migrant' (2008) is a standardised migrant who makes use of a standardised device, with no space given to particularities that are precisely born of individuals' own cultural understandings and domestication. Then both theories are potentially complementary: the transnationalism-migration stream with elements that give life to different constructions of the internet; and domestication by cross-border and culturally charged experiences in a not so bounded location.

# Chapter III

# From theory to the fieldwork: operationalisation of migrant Latinas' internet construction

## 3.1 Research questions and operationalisation of concepts

'If you want to get to the internet, don't start from there' (p. 5) was the advice from Miller and Slater (2000) following their empirical work with Trinidanians. Their premise is based on the dead end of analysing a virtual vs. a real arena as these are not separate entities. To understand online uses and relations, answers have to be sought outside the screen. I will argue that technology and their condition as immigrants should be taken into account when studying migrant Latinas' domestication of the internet. I do so by focusing on the context of my participants: their social as well as technological trajectory. My aim is to grasp technological perceptions and beliefs that lead to the construction of the internet in this population and how it is framed in a context of migration, transnational links and socioeconomic disadvantage. Therefore to assess how technologies acquire meanings in the private arena, and how, and to what extent, they alter users' everyday lives it is necessary to deconstruct their context as migrant Latinas with transnational links. These social and technical elements are entwined in a dynamic field where expectations, new needs and challenges frame their domestication. Scholars have been confronted by new technologies in the past, inviting them to apply a domestication framework outside the home. For example, studies of domestication in computer classes and in work environments, as well as of mobile phones (Haddon 2006a), have demonstrated how the theory needs to advance according the new, dynamic and unconfined locations where domestication happens. Although I am analysing mainly internet domestication of home computers, with this thesis I am going one step further by embracing the complexities of both the internet as a technology, and migration, as a social and cultural experience that touches on many levels in a person's life. What is new about this choice is that the group I chose to study is a mixture of adult migrant women in a position of vulnerability, and though all of them are currently internet users, their practices, confidence of use and their technological trajectories are far from similar. My methodological challenge, then, is to scrutinise the domestication process of women with different backgrounds (technological and otherwise) who are sharing a similar experience in a foreign country.

Methodologically speaking, ethnography – the main source for domestication - does pin down participants' characteristics. Yet with my research I intend to go further into their cultural codes

and technological trajectories, as I believe these are a major catalyst to their current internet practices and routines. Though in the early development of the theory this was bounded within the home, latest research has paved the way to a connected house where boundaries are blurred and transnational links are made. I am proposing to consider social and cultural aspects that lead to an understanding of their technological practices and meanings by adding into the analysis the complexities posed by migration. This particular population, who come from different socioeconomic backgrounds yet, as migrants, are in a position of being disadvantaged, enriches this research. Furthermore, their experiences in both their home countries and their current residence help to explain their technological choices and practices.

When discussing the present everyday lives of these individuals, it is not possible to ignore or erase their previous experiences, which are to some extent the starting point. This is something that could be addressed from several theoretical points of departure. I am tackling it from the cultural aspects of their appropriation and their transnational/migrant condition. These are nodes of articulation that explain the nuances of Latinas' internet domestication. This is a dual process where, in the majority of cases, a transnationalisation of the household and a redomestication process take place. Both help to place the user beyond her own home and to account for the boundaries that inform the process. Domestication theory and approaches of transnationalism and migration have previously hardly crossed. However, given the current level of mobility and immigration flows, these approaches should not remain separate. With this project I am attempting to combine both streams.

Loosening tight territorial demarcation, and embracing a transnational context and the complexity of immigration, could enrich our understanding of domestication. This would mark the end of a standardised view of immigrant experiences and the given construction of a device, inviting further investigation into the everyday life of these groups and the role of the internet in their transnational experiences. This "theoretical gap or silence" (Burawoy, 1991, p. 10) is an opportunity to revisit some of the bases of domestication in the light of migration and transnationalism studies. It may also contribute to answering questions about migrants' use of technologies, and to create a dialogue with other theoretical views that help to address these women's internet construction.

### 3.1.1 Research questions

The main theoretical question is:

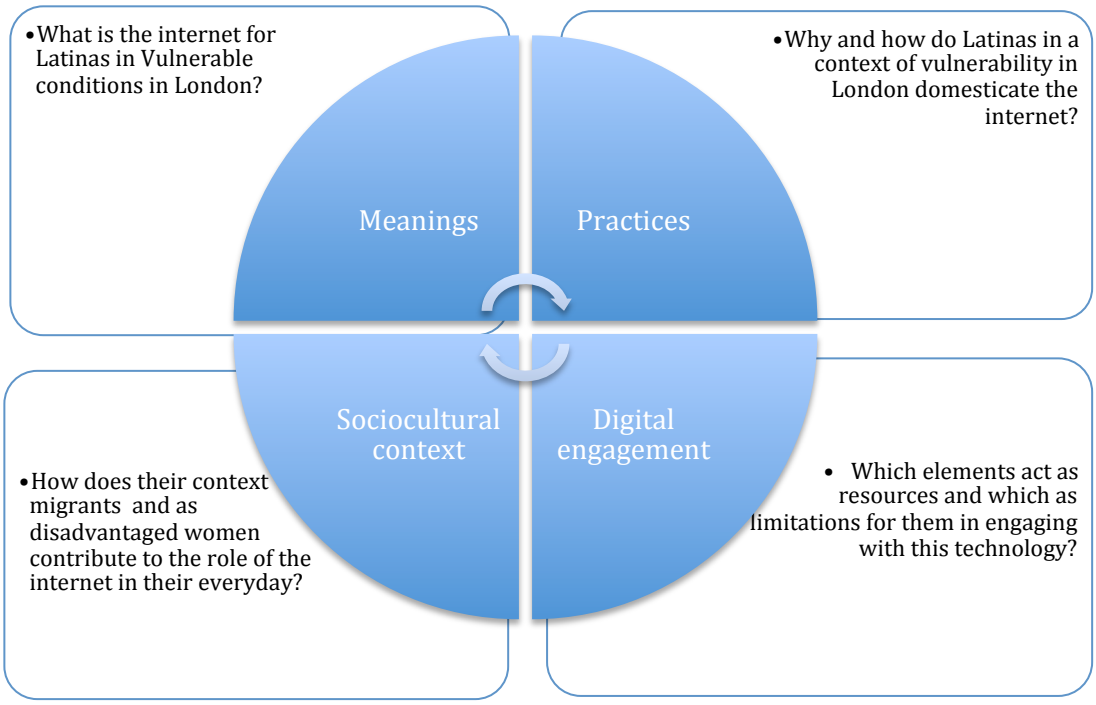
*To what extent can domestication and migration and transnational literature explain the construction of the internet by Latina migrants in vulnerable conditions?*

Empirically, I aim to examine through four streams how they domesticate the internet in their everyday lives. (a) Meanings associated with this technology, as it is not a standardised device. (b) Practices, and why, in a context of vulnerability, they appropriate the internet. (c) Sociocultural context from where they take the elements that lead them to certain choices, and that influence their construction of the internet. (d) How their digital engagement is sustained and hampered by elements of their everyday lives. These are expressed in the following empirical questions:

- *What is the role of the internet for Latinas in vulnerable conditions in London?*
- *Why and how do Latinas in a context of vulnerability in London appropriate the internet?*
- *How does their context as migrants and disadvantaged contribute to the role of the internet in their everyday lives?*
- *Which elements act as resources and which as limitations for them in engaging with this technology?*

The following figure helps to visualise these questions according to each of the categories:

**Figure 1:** The four elements of the empirical research and their related questions



### 3.1.2 Operationalisation of concepts and rationale

This research is framed within a social constructionist and interpretative approach (Esterberg, 2002). Following Esterberg (2002) and Gubrium and Holstein (1997) I seek to assess technological interpretations by Latinas of a particular social reality, and to provide a context-grounded interpretation of their internet construction.

I started to assess technologies in daily life from a domestication approach, where meanings and practices are at the core of the analysis. To address **meanings** of technological construction I captured discourses, expectations, future plans and perceptions of risk or/and fears. I made a distinction between new media and the internet because the latter was a concrete concept, whereas "new media" is a general concept referring to various technologies. I also wanted to capture their usage of the internet as a different medium, reflecting how they perceive its flexibility and where their perceptions come from. Meanings are also a reflection of the users' moral economy. Their technological understandings are somehow based on their believes, values, and interactions within the household. Yet this is a more inclusive approach that cannot be limited to technological significances, and therefore should also be addressed by further contextualising their everyday experiences regarding technological as well as social and cultural issues.

**Practices** capture the concrete place of technology in everyday life. Though closely related to their meanings, I addressed them separately to analyse how discourses are performed in the daily routine. Practices too are closely tied to the stages and articulations of domestication: how the device is perceived and used as a medium, in what context it is consumed as such and what kind of messages they negotiate. This is useful as it sheds light on strategies of use, routines, family roles and capabilities. The location of the device and the quality of the connection were also part of this category. Using anecdotal data was a risk, yet necessary to discuss in depth their habits and to dissect domestication as a holistic process.

The role of **sociocultural context** is an important element in technological interpretations. It is a broad category that incorporates cultural understandings and daily settings. It too touches on the moral economy of the household and affects how people interact with one another, as well as influencing the selection of messages negotiated. To operationalise I have divide it into two subcategories: (a) cultural understandings: these are an indicator of how people position themselves as migrants in a foreign culture. It refers to how they relate to their surroundings beyond a technological viewpoint. In the topic guide it was an icebreaker from which I also assessed their aims in London and perceptions of their everyday life in the city, for example

language difficulties causing them to remain outsiders. I included cultural perceptions of their Latino roots and their own roles within the family (such as being the breadwinner, mother at a distance or family carer). I also assessed the extent of their relationships with people in London and back in their home country as an indicator of their social networks.

(b) Social and economic aspects address their immediate context covering household, occupation, and how family responsibilities are experienced in their daily routines, among others. These were related to challenges met in the city and linked to vulnerabilities. Additionally the internet's role is directly related to the specificity of the moment yet previous uses and associated meanings are also significant. Therefore I aimed to recreate a timeline of participants' daily context before London, to address the variety of their backgrounds and the changing of aims, needs and resources. The timeline also covered reasons for migration and overall evaluation of their experience of living in the city, and future plans.

Through the nature of their **digital engagements** I covered their technological paths. My approach was holistic as reasons for current decisions are to be found in their story. Therefore I covered their current engagement and the story of it. I searched for the elements that led them to become users of computers and the internet, their first experiences, and the role of family and/or friends on the process. I also explored aspects that, according to participant's views, sustain their engagement (such as motives, gains) or obstruct them (problems encountered). Proficiency self-perception and the involvement of other people were included in this category. Finally I looked for activities related to communications and media consumption.

## 3.2 On choosing ethnography

There is no shortcut to understanding how people make sense of the internet and what role it plays in their lives. A qualitative approach seemed appropriate since it incorporates the participants' context, attitudes and behaviour (Porter, 2000) It provide tools for the scrutiny of social phenomena, which is essentially context-specific, with a focus on the 'how' more than on the 'what' (Berger, 1998; Esterberg, 2002; Fontana and Frey, 2005). Silverstone (2005) points out that this kind of strategy provides an inclusive approach, incorporating the functions, meanings and uses of ICTs in people's everyday lives. Previous research and the body of literature on vulnerable people and internet use also show how crucial it is to contextualise their experiences to unfold the elements influencing their technological paths. Researchers have also highlighted how the natural settings in which these activities are embedded reveal the

'important and previously missing aspects of this medium's social shaping' (Bakardjieva, 2005, p. 195) (see also Gillespie, 2000; Hine, 2000; Miller and Slater, 2000).

I selected a qualitative design that allowed me to become immersed in the day-to-day lives of migrant Latinas and to give them a voice. I let them to be the ones to lead me to an understanding of the why and how of their technological choices, trajectories and degrees of involvement. Ethnography indeed is an open approach that allows researchers to be part of the social setting, to make observations and to obtain first-hand information (Bryman, 2012). It is more flexible because the 'researcher can change directions' (p. 404). Yet it presents challenges because it is based on perceptions and interpretations where data is a product of observations and insights (Geertz, 1973):

> What the ethnographer is in fact faced with (…) is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which we must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render (…) Doing ethnography is like trying to read (…) a manuscript – foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations, and tendentious commentaries (Geertz, 1973, p. 9-10).

Participants' voices and stories, with all the incoherence and back and forth of human choices, are the data. The aim is to contribute to sustaining the debate rather than to report definitive and sound conclusions (1973). Since I am capturing a moment in the life of these women, my aim was not to make generalisations about their experiences, but to address the elements that help readers to comprehend their understandings and to follow their domestication. This was not easy to achieve because when cultural elements are present there is an extensive process of guessing, assessing guesses and trying to draw explanatory inferences (1973).

Research design aimed to clarify certain aspects of migrant Latinas' relationship with the internet, contributing to the field with contextuality and heterogeneity of knowledge (Kvale, 1996). I attempted to achieve it through 'thick description' to provide rich accounts and details, and furthermore to order them in a hierarchy of objects with meaningful structures (Bryman, 2012; Geertz, 1973). These provide the elements to address behaviours, which are intrinsically context-specific (Bryman, 2012).

### *3.2.1 In-depth interviews*

Ethnography relies on a variety of methods, including interviews. This was the main strategy for gaining access to participant's experiences (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000; Peräkylä, 2005). They

help to explore new and significant issues (Bryman, 2008). They are also more suitable for addressing private and emotionally charged topics (Rosenblum, 1987), such as the challenges of these women as migrants with social and economic difficulties. Feelings, attitudes and beliefs are covered (Berger, 1998), helping the researcher to achieve 'a fine-textured understanding' (Gaskell, 2000, p. 39).

Nevertheless, interviews entail inconveniences. They are a one-way dialogue with an agenda, resulting in power asymmetry (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). It is not "an open and free dialogue among equals" (p. 33) and that may affect their production of knowledge (2009).[17] As people recount their actions, researchers rely on people's interpretation and memories rather than on their actual behaviour. This raises several problems, such as omission of information (details that may be taken for granted by the interviewee or that are difficult to express in words, or that they consciously decide they do not want to share with the researcher); or a misleading view of the situation shaped by the particular standpoint of the informant, which is not open for verification (Gaskell, 2000). In my experience one of the risks was related to the vulnerability and difficulties experienced by participants, which were in some cases not easy for them to share, so that they put up defences (Berger, 1998)[18]. Moreover, to rely on reports was also risky due to hidden beliefs, which are not necessarily conscious, or contradictory discourses and behaviours which make the process more difficult (1998).

#### 3.2.1.1 Implementation of the interviews

Although the main categories were maintained, my topic guide changed repeatedly as a response to the iterative process of ethnography and to address new topics encountered during fieldwork. This does not mean that I addressed different themes, but I tried to make it easier for participants to guide the conversations according to themes. What did not change was the order of questions. I started with their immigration stories and experiences, both as an icebreaker and to gain a general idea of what they were dealing with. It was first broached at a general level and later in the interview, after trust had been gained, I would return to it. Then I continued by asking them to describe how their day-to-day lives were composed, their responsibilities, their favourite activities. It was also an opportunity to get to know more about their families. I did not ask specifically at this stage about their internet use, so as to see whether the topic came up naturally. It was also an effective way to see how frequently it came up when they described the communality of their lives, and this was of great help for contrasting with their later discourses.

[17] For a further discussion of this aspect, please refer to the subsection of this chapter on ethnicity, where I address reflexivity and my role as a Latina in a position of privilege.

[18] There were also participants that perceived these the interviews as an instance to share these in a friendly way.

The subsequent sections of the interview directly addressed technology, asking for their first experiences with computers and with the internet. At the beginning I took a more general approach, which also helped them to relax in their accounts rather than feeling pressure or obligation to speak solely about technology. The internet is in this regard one of many technologies and at this stage of their accounts I could appreciate whether it was crucial or not. This was also an opportunity to differentiate between participants' stories and address differently the particularities of their stories. I would then follow with questions about their social networks and media consumption. Finally I asked them to evaluate their experiences with the internet and with technology, to give them space to comment freely on aspects that perhaps had not been covered. I ended by asking socio-demographic questions such as age, nationality, legal status, civil status, flatmates, occupation, and earnings. I also took the opportunity to write comments regarding the place where the interview had been conducted and comments on emotions, behaviour, etc.[19]

### *3.2.2 Participant observation*

The relationship of Latinas with the internet is difficult to account for only through interviews because there are things that they take for granted or find difficult to put into words (Bryman, 2012). Scholars argue, therefore, that the complexity and dynamic features of society are better addressed by a combination of methods (Fontana and Frey, 2005). Therefore the research was designed to combine interviews with participant observation. This is one of the most effective methods in ethnographic studies. Researchers can see through the other's eyes and become immersed in the world studied. Furthermore, when combined with interviews, it helps to avoid superficial contact with participants and equips the researcher much better to make sense of participants' experiences (Bryman, 2012). In my research observation, limited as it was, it was a powerful source of data as enabled me to be in front of the screen with the women who took part in this study, and to have access to details that they might not have noticed.

Previous researchers in the field also chose to study the relationship with technologies in a natural setting through this method (see, for example, Bakardjieva, 2005; Leung, 2005; Miller and Slater, 2000). The advantage is that it is possible to have access to participants' life stories and to either match or contrast their reported and actual behaviours (Flick, 2002; Gilbert, 2008; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). It also provides insight into where people actually place technologies in an everyday setting and how they interpret them. Thus "people's actions and accounts are studied in everyday contexts (...) 'in the field', where they naturally happen"

[19] Please refer to Appendix 1 for an English version of the topic guide.

(Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). To sum up, the data collected (a) increases in breadth and enables observations to be triangulated and contradictions to be followed up (Bauer and Gaskell, 2000); (b) it provides an "intuitive understanding" giving an added perspective to the data (Bernard, 2006); and (c) enables a privileged role in accessing information that could otherwise be difficult or impossible to obtain (Junker, 2004). To maintain focus and to organise a great deal of notes Flick (2002) suggests the organisation of social situations into dimensions such as space, actor, activity, object, act, event, time, goal and feeling. These categorisations serve as useful examples, but the core of ethnography is to embrace the flexibility of the method and to be as aware as possible of the situation.

Difficulties present themselves from the very beginning as access relies on negotiation and is not guaranteed (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Furthermore it is an on-going process that takes time to design, constantly redefining questions and research drivers with a limited scope because observations focus on only a few cases (2007). There is also no certainty that one will be able to reach a point where the researcher's presence does not make participants uncomfortable (Bernard, 2006). To avoid disturbing the natural setting is another struggle, yet familiarity and to a certain extent invisibility are needed (Flick, 2002). On the other extreme the researcher's independence can also be compromised by going native[20] and perhaps not noticing and therefore not processing valuable data (2002).

During the design stage I aimed to capture Latinas' internet usage and the surroundings where it took place. I did not follow Flicks' (2002) categories, although some of them were helpful when planning beforehand how I would do it in practice. Then I decided that the main focus would be on how women interact with the internet and the websites they visit. In my plan they would narrate the why and the how of their actions while I took notes of concrete/physical aspects and recorded their voices. This was inspired by "online tours" strategy (Bakardjieva, 2005) where participants acted as guides for the researcher by showing in practice how they use the internet while explaining their actions. I also carefully planned to follow a strict frame of observations, planning to spend three days with each woman on a combination of weekends and workdays. The best case scenario was to achieve 36 days of observations, and the minimum number of women to be observed would be eight, providing 24 days of data.

### *3.2.3 Lessons from a pilot study*

To gain orientation, to explore the scenario and to evaluate the complexity of the topic (Spradley cited in Flick, 2002, p. 140) the research design included a pilot study. It was

[20] The concept refers to how, through the very act of using the method, some aspects start to feel natural and no longer attract the attention of the researcher

conducted with twelve women, ten of them being recruited from Casa Latina, a community centre for Latinas in need that offered computer and internet classes. The other two were recruited in their workplace (cleaners at student accommodation). They were all interviewed. The likely number of observations was too difficult to determine without a more solid knowledge of the participants' everyday life situations. Therefore for the pilot I observed the twice a week internet class at Casa Latina for one month. I also went once to the homes of the two participants that did not attend the centre. From this experience I was able to reframe and to improve several aspects of the research, such as the topic guide, and recruitment aims and strategies. The more relevant are in the following account:

#### 3.2.3.1 Variety of migrant Latinas' backgrounds

The first surprise encountered in the field was that not all Latinas in London in a challenged socioeconomic situation were from the same background. The poor quality of life they were experiencing at the time they participated in the study was their *current* situation. It did not reflect the situation they had previously been in. This was also a reflection of my own prejudices in expecting these women to have a history of deprivation and lack of opportunities both in their home countries and in their country of residence. My views were based on the profile that the literature has signalled as being unreachable by digital engagement policies.

The variety of women and their experiences bring different layers of complexity to the project. Their stories were fairly different as there were women who had not always had lives of economic and cultural challenge. I encountered women who at the time of the fieldwork were in a stage of vulnerability, but whose past had been different[21]. After this I was able to map the different technological stories of people encountering computers very early on in their lives, and with a level of education where the internet was an obligatory passage point. By contrast, for others the internet had been taboo for years and was now not something they could possibly embrace. Therefore this new information helped me to reassess the profile of the women targeted. It also encouraged me to look for women outside computer classes, since these were more likely to have previous internet experience.

#### 3.2.3.2 Overcoming the intrusiveness of ethnographic methods

[21] When I was interviewing cleaners at 6.30 a.m., after their second shift, and they told me about their previous careers as journalists, dentists or business owners, this was an eye-opener for me and made me realise that immigration is a process where decisions are somehow a gamble and that people's lives turn on such things.

During the pilot study I extended to all participants an invitation to take part in the second stage of the study, i.e. the participant observation. When I planned observations I did so by considering the literature and was completely unaware of several other factors, such as the timetables of my participants. I did not realise that many of them did not know the difference between weekends and workdays, and that for them the week was organised around limited days off from time to time. I also did not expect them to have such hectic schedules, or that it would be so difficult to gain access to their homes, since some of these were tiny rooms in shared houses. Furthermore, with those who had the time and the availability to let me in I could not get past the researcher-participant barrier: they treated me as a guest in all circumstances, altering their behaviour from what they usually did and experiencing what Bernard (2006) refers to as the researcher's presence making participants uncomfortable. Furthermore, after talking to them I realised that many of them were living in conditions they were not proud of, and that they did not feel comfortable letting a stranger in. Of course this is one of the challenges and I understand there is a trust that needs to be gained in order to have access, yet during the pilot I did not have the time to forge such trust. Moreover, after getting to know their practices I realised that, for example, some would make use of the internet in the intimacy of their bedrooms: at dawn before work, or before going to sleep - situations where my presence would have been too intrusive.

It was for this reason that I limited the natural settings observed to that of computer/internet classes, where they completely forgot about the research and treated me as a teacher, and also showed their real interests in terms of learning and aims. For those who were not students in such classes, I limited the observations to meetings where they would show me where they connected to the internet (if possible), and their online activities and how they carried these out. Although this was different from the original plan, I was able to collect a good amount of data and field notes that, in combination with the interviews, made me feel certain that I had reached the core of the topic.

#### 3.2.3.3 Migration as a key aspect of their domestication

During this first stage I also failed to give importance to their migrant experiences. The pilot's topic guide is a reflection of this. It was structured with significant focus on their relationship with the internet, including place of use, rules, activities, problems encountered, among others. Their everyday lives and their experiences as immigrants were the opening topics. Although I expected these to play a role in their technological experiences I had not noticed beforehand how crucial they were. Examples of these are cases of broken families or inability to understand or communicate in English. These shifted how the project was initially conceived:

from women struggling in front of a computer screen due technological reasons to the idea of individual migrant women living "at unease" in a strange environment. Furthermore, when analysing the data it also became clearer that there was a need to incorporate a new stream of transnational and migrant literature to make sense of one portion of the information collected.

#### 3.2.3.4 Spanish, the only language in which to conduct the research

In the majority of Latin American countries Spanish is the first language, yet for the pilot I conducted one interview with a Brazilian[22] in English. Her limited knowledge of the language prevented her from articulating some of the core ideas and her own feelings. At some point she started to say some words in Portuguese that are similar to Spanish. Although I did understand the concept she wanted to communicate, the hazards of our interaction were too distracting. It proved that in order to achieve a certain bond with the interviewee we would first need to agree on a language that both felt comfortable with and that would result in more natural discussion[23]. Finally it became apparent that language, in particular their lack of English, was also crucial to other themes ranging from the people they were friends with and their social networks to their favourite television programmes.

## 3.3 The who, why, how and where of the participants

### *3.3.1 Population*

The research was conducted in London because of reports indicating that the majority of Latinos in the UK reside there. It was also due to my own geographical constraints. To enhance the explorative aspect of this ethnography and because of the limited previous research and literature on the topic, the criteria I followed were loose. First, since the word "migrant" can describe anyone from a newcomer to the city to those who have established a life and a family abroad, the selection of participants was fairly flexible and subject to three main conditions: (a) participants should be women; (b) they should have been born and lived in Latin America and (c) should have migrated as adults. I did not discriminate according to marital status, motherhood or nature of their migration (e.g. legal, illegal, students, etc.). To address the condition of vulnerability I aimed for women earning the minimum wage, and/or people out of work surviving on a similar amount of money. I also included women who reported economic

[22] Brazil's official language is Portuguese

[23] Later in the fieldwork, language proved a major theme, particularly because I did not foresee the lack of English ability among participants. Therefore, even if I had carried on including Brazilian women, I would later have had major problems with actually including their reports and experiences in the research.

hardship due to their occupations and/or housing. Legal status would also contribute to their marginalisation in the case of false student visas or people who had entered the country unlawfully.

As discussed in the pilot study section, to have Spanish as native language was an important consideration to facilitate the research process and to make interactions between participants and myself as natural as possible. In terms of their proficiency in the use of technologies, there was no prior requirement except that they had to consider themselves internet users. This decision was made in order to ensure the recruitment of women with a diversity of engagement experiences.

#### 3.3.1.1 Sampling

Qualitative and explorative research design aims for greater understanding of a topic in detail. It is a "breadth for depth" approach that enables the collection of the most data possible from a small number of people (Esterberg, 2002, p.93). Therefore I looked for participants with the characteristics previously discussed. I followed a purposive sampling procedure because it allows choosing of participants that illustrates these issues (Silverman, 2013, p. 148). Yet it means critically evaluating each of the women before including them in the final sample (2013). For instance, I recruited women who at the beginning appeared to meet the criteria, but after the interview I realised they were not in the kind of position of vulnerability or economic struggle that I was looking for. The fine line between "migrant Latinas" and "migrant Latinas in need" was therefore one of the concerns when selecting participants. Similar was the criterion that they should have migrated in adulthood, which enriches the decisions behind their experiences as foreigners in terms of motives, why they chose the UK, clashing cultural understandings, among others, and how the internet fits in. Generic purposive sampling better addressed this issue because it supports selection guided by a mix of prior criteria and contingency (Bryman 2012, p. 422).

The first access to participants was through community centres. Nonetheless the problem was that it would incorporate into the study only people who seek help or are interested in participating in activities offered by such places. These would rule out the vulnerable, perhaps in a worse condition, that did not have the will or the resources to attend (e.g., lack of knowledge about these places, conflict of schedules, insufficient money for transport, fear of being discovered as illegals). It was for this reason that I employed a snowball sampling as it is designed to address hard to reach populations (Bauer and Aarts, 2000; Bryman, 2012; Gilbert, 2008). I aimed for people who did not attend the centres but were within the social networks of

those that did. Still in the field I realised that people were more isolated than expected and therefore only a few could be recruited using this strategy. I therefore addressed women who could meet the criteria based on their occupation. Cleaners were my choice based on the latest reports on Latinos in London (McIlwaine et al, 2011).

As researchers have pointed out, it is very difficult to define a priori a sample size in qualitative work (Bryman, 2012). It is a sort of "balancing act" (2012), between (a) enough participants to me to reach saturation and draw conclusions (not generalisations) with a certain level of confidence; and (b) the amount of data that a single researcher could manage in the course of two years (Gaskell, 2000). This included time available to conduct fieldwork, resources, transcriptions and analysis. This is particularly important when two methods are part of the plan. I aimed for 30 participants. The final number of women who met the criteria and took part in the study was 37, including some from the pilot study.

I conducted a systematic and focused observation at both community centres Casa Latina and Irmo. I used a narrow perspective concerning the research questions (Flick, 2002). The observations in homes and public places with women presented several constraints that ended up preventing them being categorised as participant observation as such. It was selective observation, where the aim was to look for further evidence and examples of the practices and environments where Latinas made use of the internet (2002).

#### 3.3.1.2 Access and recruitment in community centres

**Casa Latina** is a charity centre aiming exclusively for Latinos located in Kilburn, north-west London. They provide a wide range of assistance (legal, education, nursery, etc.) They also have computer and internet classes. The person in charge of the computer class was in regular touch with the community and also speaks Spanish. He was interested in the research and allowed me to become his assistant on a voluntary basis. We agreed that he would introduce me as both assistant and researcher and tell the class that I was there to help and to observe and take notes on the female students. All the students in the class accepted me and the research and received me very warmly (although informed consent was only signed by the women in the class)[24]. For the purpose of the research I carried out observation before, during and after classes with two different groups on two days a week. I interviewed students outside the classroom, ideally in

[24] In the following months and before finishing the fieldwork, I received an offer to take charge of one of the classes, with the same students but at a different level. I accepted, not only because this would be an extra input for the research, but also because I was comfortable in the environment and with the students, to whom I was by then close.

their homes or in a café nearby. For those who had internet access I was able to have a further tour of their online activities in the physical space where they usually connected.

Access was less easy outside Casa Latina. I asked in other institutions dedicated to Latinas, such as the Latin American Welfare Group (Carila), which focuses are women with high levels of vulnerability. They refused help or any involvement as internet use was of no relevance for them. I should also mention that I offered to teach computer classes, but this was turned down. Although I ended up through other channels interviewing women who attended Carila, after several attempts I decided not to carry on with my approaches to the centre.

Another try was made at the **Indoamerican Refugee Migrant Organisation (IRMO)**, in Brixton, south London. They offered computer and internet classes, although more informally than at Casa Latina. They had only six laptops and therefore classes were smaller. They did not have a regular teacher, only different volunteers who filled in during the week. I presented myself as a researcher and offered my services as a main teacher. I was accepted after a short interview with the manager, and students also agreed to take part in the study. At this centre I proposed a three-month course in order to fit with the timeframe for fieldwork. The women who attended the course were also interviewed outside the classroom. After this experience I looked no further for formal organisations in which to conduct participant observation because the data gathered at both centres proved rich and also my work in the two organisations was energy- and time-consuming.

#### 3.3.1.3 Access and recruitment outside community centres

The interviews with the students helped me to continue with a snowball approach, getting to know their social networks and recruiting participants that were not part of any class. This was not entirely successful due their limited social networks. Some introduced me to their relatives, such as mothers, siblings and daughters, which enriched the sampling. Moreover the profiles of the students were fairly similar, leaving out a category of migrants with different levels of vulnerability and who are not reached by charities. I also needed access to Latinas with a wider range of technological experience, and not only those who needed guidance.

To achieve it I started by using a variety of centres as platforms to recruit women who also attended other activities. For example, I spent days attending activities for children, where I would talk to the mothers. That is how I went to “Gotitas de Sabor” (Little drops of Flavour), a dancing class for children in the Elephant and Castle area in south London, where many Latino migrants live and gather. However it was odd to be waiting for the mothers to arrive in order to

approach them. Some of them were not comfortable with my invitation to be part of the research, and of those who expressed interest I was able to contact just one for an interview. I next conducted recruitment at a playgroup organised by Irmo. To approach in a more natural way, I constructed a short survey to find out about women's internet use and their willingness to be part of my study. This also proved more effective than advertising in common areas of the centre or on Latino webpages.

To expand the range of participants and to recruit not only mothers or women who attended any kind of group, I looked for Latinas at their place of work. Cleaner is a common occupation and so became my new recruitment strategy. I first contacted the companies running such services to gain access to their employees, but again it was not successful[25]. Later I approached the workers directly and ask about their interest in taking part. I started at my own university (LSE), since my being a student might inspire trust in potential participants. Being a woman, addressing them in Spanish and putting forward my Latina status opened the door to their direct managers (also Latinos) and to the workers. As the cultural codes require in this case, recruitment had to be conducted face-to-face, agreeing on an interview date and place as soon as possible. This required me to recruit between 5 am and 7 am at university. Interviews would usually take place in a nearby café right after their shift or in some cases in their homes.

I offered a reward to all participants. I was able to give £10 for their time in the interview and, for those observed on an individual basis (not students in classes), £10 for the observation[26]. For interviews in public places I offered breakfast or a beverage as a courtesy[27]. None of the participants expressed any feeling of being offended by the payment, and they all agreed to also sign a receipt in exchange. Personally I did not find the payment problematic from an ethical point of view because they were in a situation where their time was extremely valuable.

**Table 1:** Participants' details[28]

| Participant[29] | Age | Country of birth | Occupation | Monthly income | Place to access the internet | Place of recruitment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

[25] My guess is that the number of illegal workers employed made these companies unwilling to give access to a researcher

[26] The majority of resources spent on the project were provided by a departmental grant for research, for which I offer profuse thanks.

[27] When the interview/observation was carried out in the participant's place, tradition dictates that the guest (in this case me as a researcher) is greeted with food, and it was very difficult for me not to accept the warm welcome in many of their homes. Thus, as a researcher I accepted the hospitality as a way to gain their trust and to be respectful to the homeowner.

[28] Please refer to Appendix 3 for the table of participants with greater details.

[29] Names have been changed in order to protect the confidentiality of participants.

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elisa | 28 | Venezuelan | Occasional saleswoman | No income | Home | Gotitas de Sabor |
| Heidi | 28 | Peruvian | Nursery-Kitchen | £800 | Home - Cybercafe | Through someone working at Irmo |
| Fabiola | 31 | Bolivian | Cleaner | £800 | Home (Ipod) | Student hall |
| Daniela | 32 | Colombian | Student | Don't know | At home | Daughter of one participant |
| Diane | 32 | Colombian | Cleaner | £700 | Home/ Mobile | University building |
| Vivian | 32 | Colombian | Student + cleaner | £700 | Home and blackberry | Friend attending to beginners English classes |
| Constanza | 34 | Bolivian | Carer | £1,000 | Home / Work | Friend of one participant |
| Andrea | 34 | Bolivian | Cleaner | £1,000 | Home and bus (Ipod) | Student hall |
| Milena | 35 | Peruvian | Cleaner | £355 | Home | Friend of one participant |
| Nieves | 35 | Colombian | Cleaner | £1,200 | Home | Friend of one participant |
| Amalia | 38 | Bolivian | Hair dresser | £600 | Yes | Friend of one participant |
| Antonia | 38 | Ecuadorian | Cleaner | £620 | Home | Survey at playgroup in Irmo |
| Cindy | 39 | Bolivian | Cleaner | £456 | Cybercafe - Home | Through someone working at Irmo |
| Mirentxu | 39 | Bolivian | Cleaner | £514 | Work | University building |
| Valeria | 40 | Colombian | Cleaner - Kitchen | £1,000 | Home | Someone working at Carila |
| Marta | 40 | Chilean | Cleaner | £600 | Community centre | Casa Latina |
| Francisca | 41 | Colombian | Cleaner | £800 | Cybercafe | Through someone working at Irmo |
| Berta | 42 | Bolivian | Student + nursery & kitchen assistant | £300 | Home, Public Library, Community centre | Casa Latina |
| Sara | 42 | Ecuadorian | Unemployed | £440 | Home | Friend of one participant |
| Carolina | 43 | Colombian | Unemployed | £260 | Home | Survey at playgroup in Irmo |
| Bernardita | 45 | Colombian | Cleaner | £400 | Home | |
| Victoria | 46 | Colombian | Cleaner | £1,200 | Home | Friend of one participant |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nidia | 55 | Colombian | Retired | Won't say | Community centre, home and Ipod | Casa Latina |
| Juana | 56 | Colombian | Cleaner | £900 | Cybercafe - Son's place | University building |
| Loreto | 57 | Colombian | Unemployed | £400 | Community Centre | Casa Latina |
| Patricia | 63 | Colombian | Retired-Benefits | £528 | Home and Community Centre | Irmo |
| Julia | 63 | Colombian | Retired-Benefits | £528 | Home and Community Centre | Irmo |
| Eli | 64 | Colombian | Retired-Benefits | £490 | House, community centre | Casa Latina |
| Lorena | 64 | Colombian | Cleaner | £650 | Community centre | Casa Latina |
| Macarena | 65 | Peruvian | Cleaner (+ pension) | £500 | Community centre | Casa Latina |
| Natalia | 65 | Colombian | Retired-Benefits | £540 | Community centre and Blackberry | Casa Latina |
| Mónica | 67 | Colombian | Cleaner | £200 | Community centre and Blackberry | Casa Latina |
| Paula | 68 | Colombian | Retired-Benefits | £520 | Community Centre | Casa Latina |
| Denise | 68 | Colombian | Cleaner | £430 | Community centre and Cyber café | Casa Latina |
| Elena | 76 | Colombian | Retired-Benefits | £520 | House | Friend of one participant |
| Leticia | 83 | Colombian | Retired-Benefits | £490 | House and Community Centre | Casa Latina |
| Vania | 85 | Colombian | Retired-Benefits | £520 | House and Community Centre | Casa Latina |

## 3.4 Interviews and observations in place

The fieldwork was conducted between October 2010 and May 2011. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by myself, as a way of conducting a first analysis. I also made notes on participants' topic guide sheets, and in my fieldwork notebook[30]. At the beginning of the meeting, the participant was handed the informed consent form in Spanish, and at the end an envelope with £10 in cash was given, as she signed the receipt. After that I invited her to be involved in the second part of the research, which was the observation. She either agreed or

[30] These were expressions, impressions of the place where this was conducted, and general comments and reflections that could link their testimonies to the concepts and literature

excused herself, indicating some logistical problems, in which case I would offer alternatives, such as meeting in a different place or at a different time.

Participants are divided between those who attended classes and those who did not. The first group were older women who were starting their domestication process and needed guidance. They were retired and/or worked part-time, with a couple of exceptions: women who had hectic schedules but attended on their days off. Socialising with these participants in a situation such as the computer classes allowed me to observe their interests and anxieties and where the technological challenges lay. The weekly relationship, in this familiar and friendly environment, was also an opportunity to get to know these women better and open up aspects of their lives. It helped that, when possible, the interviews with the students were conducted in their homes, where I could see the location of their technological devices as well as their living conditions.

The other group of women who participated were not students and had a different profile. They were younger and their domestication was more advanced. They were in the process of re-accommodating the space for and role of technology. Their interviews were also conducted primarily in their homes, or in a public setting when that was not possible. I tried to have a second meeting at the place where they usually connect to the internet if the first interview was conducted elsewhere. Sometimes this was not possible because some of them where ashamed of the rooms they rented or because they only spent part of the night or odd hours there. If that was the case we would meet in a café in their neighbourhood and I would bring mobile internet to install on their computers. The preference for holding the interview in their surroundings, rather than in a city-centre café with Wi-Fi, was not a random one. On the contrary, it was designed firstly to be able to have access to their environment, and secondly to show interest and willingness to go to them instead of their coming to me, which was also based on a cultural code of showing willingness and respect.

Observation was very useful because it provided me with a better understanding of their situations and sometimes living conditions. In the centres I usually arrived ten minutes prior to the class to socialise with the students more privately and to get to know their interests and concerns. I also helped them to switch on computers and to carry out some activity online while they were waiting for the class to start. When discussing the internet, their comments on their experiences provided a basic idea of their interactions, and I could compare what they said about technologies with how that materialised (or not) in their practices. It was also useful because it was difficult to ask them to narrate their experiences, since they tended to be more general and in some cases to indicate particular problems or struggles.

Observations with students were the most useful and interesting, because I caught them in the process of domestication, while they were evaluating the technology as such. It was one thing for them to report on how frustrating it was to not find the right key, but another to observe this struggle unfolding. Watching their expressions of happiness with something such as sending their first email was very important and shaped my experience as a researcher, as well as an observer. I also became much more involved in their interactions with computers and the internet in the centres, which made the interviews easier.

### *3.4.1 Problems encountered during fieldwork*

This depth and familiarity was not achieved outside the centres, in the observations in homes and cafes. This was also a matter of degree. For example, with the women who accepted that I interview them in their homes, the observation felt more natural than in other scenarios, since it occurred after an hour of a half of chatting. In that time I had the opportunity to interview them on their own terrain, and although I was treated as a guest they would let me into their bedrooms or shared spaces to explore their computer[31]. The lesser degree of observation happened with the women who did not agree to be interviewed in their homes, but nonetheless wanted to participate in the study. Because of difficulties in recruitment and my aim of obtaining greater variety than only computer class members, I did not rule these women out. They argued logistical reasons at first, but later, during the interviews, it became clear that they were not comfortable bringing anyone to their rooms because of the small space. Despite the lack of a natural setting I would describe these interviews as very rich. In some cases they agreed to meet for a second time to show me how they used the internet, and although I tried again it was still not possible to conduct this meeting in their own rooms.

Observations were intrusive and required a period of adjustment that sometimes was not possible to achieve. Observing at the centres while giving classes was much more successful because of the familiarity and because of my role as a helper. This made participants forget they were being observed. When in the household or in coffee shops, I had to rely more on the personality of the informant and their willingness to share. This was not always achieved, which is why I would start with an interview and then invite the person to a second stage of the research project. Yet it was not always easy to gain their trust or to be accepted as an observer. In Latino culture to serve a guest is crucial, and I encountered the problem of being treated as a guest and not as a researcher or a peer. In these encounters I achieved only a limited and more

[31] Intimacy was one of the reasons why I did not asked to return to observe for a second time, since the core of the data was in the interview and in the exercise of my being a spectator of their computer use in their natural setting.

guided kind of observation. I did not record these tours through the computer and the women were slightly anxious to show me everything they did or could do, rather than to do it as they normally did. Another disadvantage was the times and places they usually had to spend time online. For example, some would do it at dawn before work and in the intimacy of their bedrooms, or in bed before going to sleep - situations where my presence would have been too intrusive. However, I did my best to replicate some of the situations. In the majority of these cases, in order to have them on board with the research, I had to compromise on this natural setting and restrict the observation.

## 3.5 Strategies of analysis

I started with the transcription of the interviews where I had the first opportunity to recreate the conversation with each participant. This provided me with the opportunity to become familiar with the material and to make some initial comments. I later conducted a thematic coding analysis (Boyatzis, 1998). This is the organisation of thematic segments that extend across interviews and can be labelled by the creation of codes (Fielding and Thomas, 2008). The main topics were previously determined by literature and previous research. Yet the organisation of the elements that were incorporated needed more work. The aim was to capture and compare data within themes, to map descriptive findings, but also to highlight emerging topics (2008). Then I turned to (a) selection, (b) reflection, (c) characterisation and (d) more detailed definition of units of analysis (Flick, 2002). In order to organise the information and to handle the data I coded the information in the software Nvivo.

The analysis of the observations was done after coding the interviews, so that I could be guided by particular themes and categories that helped me to make sense of these (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Since the major data produced was the field notes, the first step was to organise these into analytic categories. Though originally I considered following Flick's (2002) nine dimensions (space, actor, activity, among others) I then changed strategies because it made more sense to follow the thematic coding of the interviews. It was also a way of complementing that data. I photocopied the notebook in order to safeguard the records and to be able to mark, highlight and cut them up in order to organise them according to the four main units of analysis. Since I had two separate notebooks - one for my observations in classes, and another for the observations in houses/coffee shops - this helped me to classify and made easy it to extract the relevant parts from these different noted instances. The strength of the complementary methods relied on the categories used to interpret the analysis and codes from interviews. Hence I am confident I was able to achieve a more complete picture of participants' relationship with this technology and their paths of internet construction.

### *3.5.1 Units of analysis*

I organised the data into four main units of analysis. The following table offers a detailed account of the subcategories and the rationale behind such classification.

**Table 2:** Main categories of analysis, subcategories and rationale

| Main category | Subcategory | | Elements pursued |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Meanings** | | Definition of new technologies | What are the new technologies for them; discourses on new technologies |
| | | Definition of the internet | Internet in their own words; discourses on the internet |
| | | Discourses about technology | Remarks and impressions regarding the internet or new technologies |
| | | Perceived risks/fears | Experiences; what others say; beliefs regarding security online |
| | | Internet & expectations | What they want to achieve by using the internet |
| | | Internet used as another media | Internet used as television, radio, newspaper, telephone |
| | | Future plans/intentions | Aims and plans related to technology/internet; things they want to achieve with technology; other aims that require the use of technologies |
| **Practices** | | Daily internet activities | Sites visited and why; periodicity of use; experiences regarding this use |
| | | Daily computer activities | Concrete aspects of their usage; favorite sites |
| | | Role of family | Everyday internet activities and how family is involved; proxy users; help from family members; difficulties posed by family members |
| | | Context of usage | The when of internet activities; people involved; place |
| | | Media consumption (internet and otherwise) | Any activity through technology that enables them to continue with previous consumption practices; creation of new practices. Mobile phone use; cable and UK television; newspapers |
| | | Communication with family and friends abroad | Activities towards communication through technologies; reasons for communication; periodicity and reciprocity |
| **Sociocultural context** | **Cultural understandings** | Everyday life | Cultural references related to everyday life, such as social networks, consumption practices |
| | | Language | Experiences of living in an English-speaking country; challenges; learning process; how difficulties have been faced; consequences; previous expectations |
| | | Education/learning | References to importance/necessity of education; role of technologies on education/learning (formal or informal) |
| | | Latino roots and perceptions | Interpretations and experiences as Latinas in London; Latino social network in London; differences between London and country of birth in terms of codes and behaviours |
| | | Role within the family | Gender characteristics and family perceptions and experiences; duties and responsibilities with family in London and/or abroad |
| | | Relationship with family/friends | Social networks; activities; discourses on these |
| | | Household | Quality of life; accommodation; disadvantages. |
| | | Occupation | Current work; social network; experiences |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Social/Economic aspects** | Everyday life before London | Life background; experiences related to technologies that took place in another city; particular emphasis on experiences prior to immigration; immigration experiences in cities other than London |
| | | Why and how London | Why they chose London; migration stories |
| | | Satisfaction/gains from living in London | Advantages of living in the city |
| | | Challenges | Any kinds of difficulty encountered in the city; feelings of disadvantage; feelings or emotions related to disadvantage |
| | | Future plans | Aims regarding quality of life; immigration plans. |
| | | Family responsibilities | Responsibilities to direct family and relatives in London and elsewhere; remittances. |
| **Digital engagement** | | Before computer/internet | Experiences leading to use of computer/internet; needs and aims; expectations prior to use |
| | | Motives /Reasons for starting to use | Motives for starting computer/ internet use. Concrete moment; description of situation and aims |
| | | Technological opportunities encountered in home country /other than UK | Technological experiences, access, whether access to the internet before arriving to London, reasons, expectations and awareness |
| | | First time computer | Experiences of first-time computer use |
| | | First time internet | Descriptions of their first time on the internet; description of activities; description of context |
| | | Problems with computer | Barriers encountered |
| | | Problems with the internet | Challenges arising with skills, kind of connection, etc. ; anxieties |
| | | Place for connection | Where they currently connect to the internet; location of computer (if any) in the home |
| | | Computer classes | Experiences in computer classes at Casa Latina or Irmo; learning experiences in other places/countries; reasons for enrolling; efforts to do so; evaluation of the experience; role of teachers; importance of environment |
| | | Role of family/friends | How family and friends helped or made difficult the process of appropriation; how family and friends are related to their use of the internet at any time in the process |
| | | Consequences of internet use | Gains from currently being an internet user; how it interacts with their daily activities |
| | | Self- perception of proficiency | How they perceive themselves as users. Self-evaluation of their digital skills; experiences when using these; |

## 3.6 Ethics

A project of this nature involves important ethical decisions related mostly to the integrity and independence of the research. The starting point is a combination of three basic elements. (a) The first is informed consent, where participants freely agree to take part in the project after receiving relevant information about the research and also understand that they may withdraw at any stage of it. (b) The right to privacy, the protection of their identities (anonymity) and contact details (confidentiality). (c) The protection of participants from harm, meaning any kind of damage, such as physical or emotional, which in this case could be linked to distress caused

by their reflections and sharing of their personal experiences (Fontana and Frey, 2005).

Power asymmetry with participants forced me to gain their trust while maintaining independence from them. This was solved through a clear statement in the informed consent of the scope of the research, the destination of the data, the protection of their identities, and the incentives for taking part in the different stages. I also made clear that the boundaries of the relationship were framed by the research and that it was not my intention to extend them beyond this.

Another important decision was related to their migration status, which included all sorts of situations[32]. Their legal situation was not particularly asked about, and was only included in the socio-demographic section at the end of the interviews, where they could veto some questions or leave them unanswered. It also felt unnatural and aggressive to make this a criterion for selection before inviting participants to the research. This was particularly the case for students attending classes at the two charities, since the mission of both organisations was to provide welfare and also legal assistance, and the people who attend the centres trust the organisations to resolve this sort of matter. As a volunteer at both centres, I also felt a sense of commitment to their mission. Therefore I decided to not ask for this personal and sensitive information before asking an individual to join to the project, and to discuss it only if they were willing to share it during the interview, as part of the background to their experiences or at the end in the socio-demographic data.

Finally, based on my experience I will argue there is no ethical problem regarding the payment on this research. The women who took part in were people whose occupations and living conditions did not generally provide the option of obtaining £10 in return for an hour and a half of their time. I also believe that the money did not obstruct their honest interest in participating, their responses or their attitudes while I was carrying out the observations.

### *3.6.1 Informed consent and confidentiality*

All the women who took part in this research did so knowing my role as a PhD student conducting research on their internet practices. The informed consent for the interviews stated that they were willing to share their opinions and experiences, which were to be recorded and later transcribed and analysed. Their participation was voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time and without reasons, although this would mean that they would not to receive the economic incentive.

[32] This was a methodological as well as ethical decision to ensure the variety of participants regardless of this aspect

The observation consent included acceptance of the presence of the researcher in order to watch their online routines, which would be recorded in the form of notes. On both consent forms, they accepted that the totality of the results of this research – except their names - would be reported as part of a doctoral thesis and in other academic publications[33].

### *3.6.2 Reflexivity*

One of the challenges in qualitative research comes from the "personal nature of the relationship between data and the researcher" (Lewins, 2008, p. 417). In my experience this is not exclusive to the data-researcher relationship. It also applies to that between participants and researcher. This is why it is relevant to address prior biases and preconceptions (Esterberg, 2002). I was also guided by the concept of reflexivity, which is a constant exercise of being aware of my position as researcher, both when with participants and when handling of the data (Bryman, 2012). I did this by acknowledging my position as a Latina, from Chile, a migrant in London. I was in a position of privilege regarding support, social networks, and monetary and legal aspects of my residence. Despite all these advantages there was a part of me that could relate to the participants' stories. Their accounts of loneliness, reminders that I was an outsider and uncertainty of when I would be able to see loved ones again were aspects that in some ways we shared.

To speak the same language as participants was a huge advantage, a necessary starting point just in order to be able to understand and recognise us as Latinas. I am certain that Spanish language was mandatory, and that otherwise it would not have been possible to use the methods selected. My also being a Latina was of great benefit because it made us – in spite of our differences - part of the same group. One drawback was that there could be some aspects of their appropriation that became invisible because they felt 'natural' to me. I tried my best to overcome this by forcing myself to be extremely alert to every detail and to record it even if it seemed mundane.

### *3.6.3 Trustworthiness*

The data gathered and its analysis raised questions of validity. As Geertz (1973) argues, cultural descriptions are difficult and cannot be expected to be coherent or flawless portrayals, neatly and quite unrealistically structured. This is an approach where coherence should not be the test of validity (1973). Lincon and Guba (1985, cited in Bryman, 2012) developed the concept of

[33] Please refer to Appendix 2 for an English copy of both consent forms.

trustworthiness as a means of providing criteria for evaluating qualitative research. One of its elements is credibility, which focuses on codes of good practice. External bodies such as the ethics committee of LSE ensured this. Casa Latina and Irmo did too, where I had to demonstrate the validity of the project. I also obtained informed consent from all the women who took part in the project and was available to answer any questions related either to the research or to myself. Participants were offered protection of identity, confidentiality and the possibility of withdrawing at any moment without giving a reason, as well as the option to veto questions or leave them unanswered.

Transferability is also a key quality, enabling other researchers to scrutinise the data in order to find elements that they can apply in other scenarios (Bryman, 2012). This is possible through thick descriptions, which I aimed to provide in the narrative of the findings. It would also position these women in the spaces they inhabited. I did not take photographs of their homes or other places as part of this strategy, yet I did take plenty of notes on their environment and my impressions during and after the interviews, classes and any other meetings.

I also pursued trustworthiness through external consistency and by checking key aspects against other studies in the field. I also tried to be reflexive with regard to my own standpoint and constantly evaluate my encounters with participants and how I positioned myself. Finally I was alert to observations that fitted too neatly into the analytical frame (Fielding, 2008), which could be a sign of lack of natural incoherence.

## 3.7 Limitations of the study

In this project I encountered a series of restrictions. The first involved the theoretical concepts researched. The literature seemed to indicate that technology and the household where practices arose were well defined in time and space. This seemed problematic when the focus was the internet, as it can take many forms and can be accessed in a variety of ways. Also, migrants, people with dual lives, in some cases live in one place but their relationships and the majority of the media and the messages they negotiate are from another. There were a multitude of elements to take into account in designing research able to answer the question of how a particular group of women made use of the internet and what role it played in their day-to-day experiences in London.

Observations were limited by several factors: sometimes the participants' schedules; sometimes their overcroweded living conditions - to have a researcher there was extremely intrusive.

Furthermore in the Latino culture more time needs spending to be considered an invisible observer or a peer in a household. The time and energy to move beyond the status/label of visitor were beyond what I could spend. This is also related to the content, since I was interested in perceiving their interactions and how they related to the devices, leaving content for a second stage or perhaps to more superficial treatment. My aim was to observe the logic behind their use, the steps they followed, the sites they signed into and the purposes behind their visiting of certain websites. It was invasive and I had sometimes to restrain myself from being too close to the participant.

As for the data gathered, my design did not contemplate a systematic register of digital content. Although I have discussed the importance of knowing what people do online, I relied on the reports of participants and on their digital tours in order to concentrate resources and effort on immersion in the activities that surrounded their internet construction. Yet I acknowledge that a project that also incorporated this kind of data-gathering could be much richer and more complete[34].

In the classes, the limitations were imposed by the nature of my own participation. As an assistant I enjoyed the freedom to observe and make notes while interacting with the students, unlike when I was the main teacher. Then I could write notes only during free moments, usually after the class but not during it. If designing the research again I would be clear that to be a participant-observer as such is preferable be an assistant and not to have the lead role in the group.

## 3.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I focused on the rationale and methodology of the research. The aim was to unravel the back and forth between domestication concepts and data from the fieldwork, framed by migration and transnationalism. As it is an under-researched topic, the pilot stage was of great value. After this I gained a better understanding of the Latinas' migrant condition and the variety of their backgrounds - hence the need to reassess the sampling to aim for Latinas that were and were not taking classes in community centres. I also learnt that for these women the internet could be better interpreted in the light of their migration experiences. Thus I needed a broader theoretical approach that touched on their transnational links and the nature of the message/media they negotiated and consumed.

[34] A research design like this would also need more time and resources.

I also reflected on ethnography as a methodological design. The main advantages were that it enabled me to get involve in their everyday lives; the richness and contextualisation of the data; and its flexibility to look for more appropriate strategies. The main drawbacks of the design were its limited scope, time consuming nature and intrusiveness. It was not possible to carry out observations as originally planned due participants' hectic schedules and the private places where they accessed the internet. Being Latina myself was both a challenge and an advantage. I related to participants in their native language and shared cultural understandings. Yet I had to be aware of issues that due our similar cultural background might seem mundane, and also to address power asymmetry.

Data organisation and further analysis were centred on meanings, practices, sociocultural context and the nature of their digital engagement. Categories aimed to address the elements of domestication and themes linked to migration and transnational experience. Also included were technological background, discourses and activities; contextualisation of their everyday from both cultural perceptions and socioeconomic approach; migrants' trajectories; and families' composition, roles and relationships. The goal was to position technologies within their everyday lives, informed by their history and from where technology was first appropriated. Both interviews and fieldwork notes were deconstructed and organised according to these categories, and analysed according to thematic encoding, which was carried out using Nvivo.

# CHAPTER IV

## Overview: Latinas in London

Latinos in the UK have been called the "invisible" population. Despite their presence, official numbers do not acknowledge them and first hand knowledge is fairly limited. Therefore the aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the everyday lives of these migrant women in the city, and furthermore to capture how these experiences and cultural codes interact with the practices and meanings they associate with the internet. My aim is to unravel the nature and extent of its role in their transnational experience by looking at aspects such as their ties and networks, the vulnerabilities they are exposed to, their tactics for managing them, and gender characteristics. I will also reflect on their lives prior to migration to demonstrate the diversity of participants' educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. Consequently, despite being currently part of the same group they have different approaches to technologies that can be traced back to the variety of their life stories, and in some cases to previous domestications. Contradictorily, some of these differences tended to disappear once they all became foreigners, as they share understandings and ways of interpreting the internet in a context of migration and disadvantage.

### 4.1 Participants' migration trajectories and ties

Migration is a life-changing experience causing people to deal with new surroundings and cultural codes. It is in the broader experience of these women that rationale of their use of and engagement with the internet can be clarified. This is why it is worth examining different aspects of it, such as their reasons for leaving their countries of origin. It might appear peripheral at first sight, yet it enriches the understanding of their motives for remaining in the city and the challenges they faced to get there. It also touches on the wider spectrum of their ambitions and expectations, and what they are willing to do to achieve them, and furthermore on the responsibilities they carry with them as mothers, daughters, providers and/or carers. Though there is a great variety of reasons for migrating, I have grouped them into three main categories: economic, family-related, and career or personal development. Whether the decision was carefully planned or driven by desperation, all are linked to the idea of starting over and taking advantage of the opportunity to live in a developed country. These are central in understanding their living conditions and how the internet fits into these. It also enables the exploration of their domestication, either before migration or afterwards, and how technology's place is reassessed in these new surroundings.

### *4.1.1 Promises of wealth*

Migration literature highlights economic reasons as the main reason for the flow of people around the world (Turner, 2006). Therefore it was no surprise to find among participants high expectations of improving their financial status as a motive for changing countries. Ways of achieving this take different forms, such as going for a specific length of time in order solely to work and make what they would consider a substantial amount of money. For some this would be measured in terms of affording a house, or capital to start a small business once they return. For others, the length of their stay was not so clear and they hoped to remain in Europe and to bring the rest of the family to join them.

The idea that London is a profitable place has usually been fuelled by the stories they heard from other migrants returning to their neighbourhoods. They were called "successful" or even 'millionaires', an example they wanted to follow. They were also told how easily they could find jobs, although not what kind. For Vivian, a young Colombian woman, these success stories were compelling enough to make her give it a try. Despite having a husband, a two-year-old daughter and a job as a supermarket manager in Bogotá, this management graduate decided to risk working as a cleaner and learning English for an indefinite period of time, or until she had enough money to pay off her debts and to build a house back home.

As in Vivian's case (32, Colombian), migrants sometimes travel with no return date in mind other than when they have secured the required amount of money. As discussed by Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), the amount may change over time and is rarely achieved. This happened to her: she got so involved in her day-to-day life that the moment of returning home was delayed over and over again. She also encountered financial problems, for example the realisation that living in London was not as cheap as expected. Vivian also needed to send remittances to help with the upbringing of her daughter, so not everything she earned could be used to pay off her debts or put towards her goals. These sorts of economic obligations are also a reason why some of these women decided to establish themselves in the new country and start to bring their children to live with them, regardless of the hardship they faced and other challenges encountered.

It is also worth looking at the commitments these women took on in order to become migrants: Reflecting on their economic pressures and familial responsibilities helps to construct a picture of who they are and what conditions they are living in. For Vivian, the trip itself increased her

financial obligations, as she needed to afford a plane ticket, as well as a student visa[35] and living expenses. School enrolment was required for her to be entitled to a visa. At the time of my fieldwork, Vivian's monthly income as a cleaner was about £700, and her debts £5,000. This was without saving for the future house or the money she needed to send to her mother, who was taking care of her daughter in Colombia. Her situation was difficult and uncertain and she focused mainly on her work, taking as many shifts as a cleaner as she could.

For Valeria (40, Colombian), her story did not start in the UK, but in Spain. This country was more attractive to some of the participants because its traditions, culture and language are similar to those of Latin America. Furthermore, Spain previously offered attractive economic possibilities and easier access to permanent residency and citizenship. When the economic crisis left the country sinking, the first to lose their jobs were immigrants; also laws were tightened and the entire experience became less attractive. Many Latinos in Spain were reluctant to return to their home countries and looked for new destinations. Valeria was one of these, and learned by word of mouth that the UK had 'enough jobs for everybody'. This is what she told me over coffee at 7.00am, after she finished her first cleaning job of the day, and before she started at the restaurant as a kitchen assistant, where she would spend the rest of her day until 10 pm:

> *I went to Spain in the year 2000 and it was easy to find a good job; they gave it to you without demanding papers [work or resident visa] but I got them anyway after a month working, it was pretty fast! You had a very good quality of life, I had my own flat, good friends, you eat really well there too… it was a fantastic life! But then the crisis came and I was fired (…). I originally wanted to move to Barcelona because I have friends there and they said something might come up, but another friend of mine convinced me that here [in England] you find stability and you can get promoted in a job if you are good enough, which does not happen in Spain. I thought new country, new language and well, I like adventures!* (Valeria, 40, Colombian)

As in her case, many of the Latinas who migrated to Spain were able to work and study, overall to have a good quality of life, sometimes even better than they could have had in their countries of origin. Yet these successful immigration experiences gave some of them the idea that in the UK it would be somehow similar, ignoring the differences between the two countries. The most obvious of these is that of language, which had a great impact on their stories. As seen in

[35] Though coming to study was one of the most commonly used reasons for entry to the UK, they often had different goals that meant they rarely had time to attend classes. This was the easiest way to gain an entry permit and to renew the visa, although regulations have now changed and consequently many of them now lack valid papers and have became illegals.

Valeria's testimony, some thought this was insignificant - just that it would be a new experience. They were told that the economic crisis was not affecting England and many decided to give it a try. Some of them had also acquired European residency, so migration was facilitated and there was even access to housing and other social benefits, although this was the case for only a minority of my participants.

### *4.1.2 Familial obligations*

Not all reasons for abandoning their home country can be generalised under the heading of better economic prospects. They had a wide range of justifications, many linked to situations involving family members. What struck me was that family played a dual role in their reasons for leaving: in some cases to get away after a marriage breakup or the death of a loved one; or in others, to be with a loved one and maintain the bonds. Thus, children, partners and distant relatives were mentioned as reasons for migrating to London. For example, Francisca (41, Colombian) decided to move from Spain to the UK to accompany her husband, despite the fact that this would split the family for a second time. First she left Colombia alone, leaving behind her four children. It took her around five years to bring them all to Madrid, where she started a family with her new husband, also a Colombian. They lived together for around two years before difficulties arose again in 2009:

> *He spent two years unemployed in Spain, he could not find a job because he was 45 years old (...) he was demoralised. He moved to London and when I came to visit him I found him living in inhuman conditions, completely abandoned, alone, sad. I felt so sorry for him, poor thing, because in Spain he had the company of his family, the children, he was well looked after, it was very different to see him alone and abandoned in a small and dirty room.* (Francisca, 41, Colombian)

Francisca's decision to leave her children in the flat in Madrid and move to London to a small room to take care of her husband echoes the idea of the Latina woman as responsible for the wellbeing of her husband. He was not "well looked after" as in Madrid, and she felt the need to take care of him. Through a more patriarchal understanding of family roles, she was also responsible for the children, however in this case it was the man that needed help. This is a vision very much shared by my participants, which also adds to the cultural perspective on gender roles and responsibilities within the family. Guilt was also a factor: she was failing to do something she should. So Francisca and others moved countries, following partners to take care of them, which also had consequences for the rest of the family left behind. In her case her young adult children were settled in a flat in Spain, so she felt "that job" was already done so she was free to move to London to help her husband. In London she cooked for him, tidied up

the room, and also took two cleaning jobs. Since she did not understand English, she tried to attend some of the free classes provided by Irmo, one of the Latino community centres. This intention was thwarted by her job schedule and her fear of travelling around the city, particularly the complexity of the transport system. She only travelled alone to work; other journeys were always with her husband. In their small room in London Francisca did not have access to a laptop. However she lived among other Latinos, and one of her neighbours lent it to her every now and then. Thus Francisca was able to write emails to her children. She also phoned them every morning to wake them up and to wish them a good day - a signal of the responsibilities she continued to carry as a mother.

Victoria (46, Colombian) is another wife who left her daughter to be with her partner. They have being separated for most of her married life, with him in Europe making money to send to the family in Colombia. After ten years, once their only daughter, Loreto, finished school, she decided it was time to be with her husband, who was feeling lonely and depressed. It was the first time she had left the country, but more importantly, the first time she left her daughter:

> *I came alone. My husband was here and I came because he said he was bored and he did not want to stay alone anymore, so he told me to come. He stayed a year and one month alone in London (...) He came because things got rough is Spain, it became too difficult for him to find a job there (...) My expectations are to find a job here and to learn English so I can have more opportunities here or there, and to save money to return to Colombia to set up our own business, something to survive you know.* (Victoria, 46, Colombian)

Economic and family reasons are usually mixed, and it was the financial struggling that forced Victoria to go alone as she did not have the economic means to bring Loreto. Furthermore, Loreto was starting university and she did not want to interrupt her studies, so the girl continued to live at her grandparents' house. Nonetheless Victoria resented her decision. Although she was now reunited with her husband, she looked for different ways to be in touch with her daughter. This was motivated her to starting to use Facebook and Skype for the first time, both accounts set up by Loreto from overseas:

> *I never wanted to come over here because I was doing ok in my country, I was settled there and the idea of leaving my daughter alone [she starts mumbling and crying]… she has been all her life with me, you know. Despite the absence of her father she had me, and after her father left for Europe she considered me both as father and as mother*

> *figures. Then it's too sad to leave her now… it has been too hard to be far away from her* (Victoria, 46, Colombian)

The mother-daughter bond and her responsibilities as wife were a point of conflict for Victoria. The unsettling decision influences all the aspects of their experience in London. It is also linked to their motivation to take up new media and to find ways to be connected despite distance. However not all the cases are about devoted wives, there are also the heartbroken who moved countries after painful situations such as extramarital affairs or the end of a marriage, which have been called "hidden motives for migration" (see Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997, and Madianou and Miller, 2012). Juana (56, Colombian) was betrayed by her husband. After that she moved to start over. She had not previously experienced poverty or manual jobs, yet her migration resulted in a radical change of occupation and housing. Juana, previously stay-at-home wife, moved from a three-bathroom flat in Bogotá to one room with a shared kitchen and bathroom, working as a cleaner in a university incentral London. Juana decided on London because one of her children lived and married there. Her first experiences of coming to the city as a tourist and staying with them were far behind her.

"Why London" was usually linked to family. This was the case for Natalia (65, Colombian). She went to help a cousin who was having a baby and to be the main carer during the *quarantine*[36]. Mónica (67, Colombian), after spending 15 years in Italy, left for Spain to help settle her daughter there. After having a baby the daughter decided that London was the city for her to start a new career path and hence the three of them moved. Mónica's and Natalia's decisions show the solidarity among women who are family members, and how important is for them to help and to provide for family. Nonetheless, they also saw in this experience an opportunity for themselves. They had hopes and aspirations for a better future for their families and themselves, but change did not always mean improvement in their quality of life. Heidi (28, Peruvian) is another example of these family chains: she is a young single mother who, when she became pregnant, was forced to leave university and work as a shelf-filler in a supermarket in Peru. Two years ago she received a call from a cousin who was living in London inviting her to come and "*help each other have a better future*". With her daughter in mind, she did not think twice and packed all their belongings:

> *I never thought of things like having to speak English or so, the only thing I cared about was my daughter, the idea of knowing that I will give her a better future and that she will have a better life here [London] was enough* (Heidi, 28, Peruvian).

[36] It refers to the 40 days following the birth. The tradition says that the mother should remain in bed with the baby, and someone else has to take care of the house and of both of them.

Heidi pictured London as a city of opportunities for both of them. She presumed that services and access to health-care and education, as well as exposure to a different language, would improve her daughter's chances. Her role as mother and as the only provider was her motivation. Thus I encountered among these women different ways of performing their roles as mother, such as by improving their financial situations and taking care at a distance of their family, or bringing the children to provide a life for them in a developed society. Within the diversity of circumstances, the internet was positioned as a crucial aspect of their new transnational life styles, which is consistent with other similar studies (see Madianou and Miller, 2012).

### *4.1.3 The dream of career development and personal improvement*

Career and education, gaining international experience, and acquiring a second language were also among participants' aims. Nonetheless, their willingness and determination were usually daunted by the paperwork required, such as visas and professional accreditations among other things, as well as by the financial capital needed. This happened to Daniela (32, Colombian), the daughter of Mónica. This single mother used to work as an assistant in a nursery in Madrid and had great expectations of London as a place to work and study, although her poor English and lack of degree posed major barriers. She ended up living in a small flat with her mother and child, where the three of them share the same bed.

> *I have a cousin here in London, she has been living here for ten years and I told her I wanted to study and that I had no husband, and she told me to come, that she would help me ... Why I wanted to move countries? To develop, to change, to improve. I worked eight years in Spain as a nursery assistant, (...) and I said to myself, I do not want to be just an assistant, I want to be the boss of the nurses* (Daniela, 32, Colombian)

Daniela's determination was not enough. Fees, living expenses and taking care of a child, among other things, hampered her best intentions. She also tried to volunteer as a carer for elderly people in her neighbourhood, but she was rejected because she did not have the basic knowledge of English to interact with patients, so her previous work experience was also undermined. After four months of unemployment and having to work as a cleaner, she was very disappointed. Mónica, her mother, had found a similar job, but was now suffering an illness due to her continued exposure to chemicals and forced to limit her hours. This placed an extra burden on the family.

These kinds of stories, shared by other Latinas with professional backgrounds, speak of unrealistic goals and a lack of awareness of the difficulties posed by their decisions. They have a romantic idea that to become a successful professional overseas is something that can happen without major difficulties, whatever reality says to the contrary. Diane (32, Colombian) was a young dentist who ended up cleaning offices and bathrooms, where she encountered as a fellow cleaner a former university lecturer. Diane argued that she knew beforehand she would have to start there but she expected this situation to last for just a couple of months because she had Italian citizenship. Nonetheless, she had spent the last three years trying to validate her degree with no success, which had put her plans on hold. Similar are the cases of Milena (35, Peruvian), a former journalist, and Berta (42, Bolivian), with an unfinished PhD, who encountered problems with the validation of degrees, with work visas and with their English literacy. This data is consistent with the findings of previous research on Latinos in the UK, where more than half of these immigrants are reported to be employed in low-skilled and low-paid occupations such as cleaning, catering and hospitality services, regardless of their level of education and work experience (McIlwaine et al, 2011).

#### 4.1.3.1 A note on solidarity among migrants

When narrating their stories, many Latinas expressed that one positive aspect of the whole experience had been the help of other Latino migrants, even though they did not form part of a community as such:

> *Some friends that I did not know before received me in their house without charging me a penny. They have been in Europe for a long time and I am friends with the brother of one of them. So another friend told them I was going to London and they waited for me with an inflatable mattress. I came not even having a pound and they helped me to find a job* (Vivian, 32, Colombian)

This is an example of what has been argued about migration and its major component of network ties (Diminescu, 2008; McIlwaine, 2007). It refers to a process that is enhanced by interpersonal ties that connect immigrants, existing and potential, making it easy for new arrivals to find jobs in the country of destination (Turner, 2006). This help comes usually from a relative or a close friend, but also, as in Vivian's case, from people that the new migrant does not know directly. It also goes beyond the initial period of settlement and can last for a more extended time, such as in the case of Carolina (43, Colombian):

> *In Spain my partner left me with all the debts and in bankruptcy, and I did not want to return to Barcelona because I was afraid to be alone and start from scratch. This is really silly, but I wanted to look for something new for me, I thought I could be useful [crying]. A friend told me to come here [London]. I had come before in previous summers, but just for short periods of time, and it is different to move with a small child. But I told to myself, I need to try it, I need to try it (...) Here I was received by this friend who told me "I will take you to my place, count on this space to live for you and your child, but the rest is up to you", and I did it.* (Carolina, 43, Colombian)

This help and emotional support was crucial since changing countries in these conditions is very hard. The solidarity is worth noting as it provides information about their sense of camaraderie that is highlighted in these contexts. Furthermore, participants mentioned mainly fellow Latinos as their helpers, rather than people from other ethnicities. There was a sort of recognition, beyond countries, that speaks of a bond among them. Interestingly, despite these connections, they did not report being part of a formal or cohesive Latino community in the city[37], reflecting their isolation.

## 4.2 Everyday life as migrants and links to digital engagement

In these women's stories London appeared as a city of contrast where opportunities and difficulties merged. Their situations as migrants gave rise to new challenges: jobs, different cultural codes and housing, among others. It was also a place of opportunities, a white canvas to start over, and - for some - to start a technological journey not possible before. It is in these mixed circumstances that layers of vulnerability unfolded, giving an insight into where *their* internet took shape and how it was domesticated. The situations described here are diverse and involve a great deal of features that are difficult to differentiate. Yet they speak of the symbolic and physical contexts where they connected with their family, their friends, their culture, their foreign land. Mine is a holistic approach, because in every aspect of their every day lives it is possible to find pieces of why *their* internet is a *Latinas*' internet.

### *4.2.1 Poor English literacy*

Researchers have stressed that Latinos in London face a number of difficulties, yet their biggest challenge is lack of English literacy, which directly affects their quality of life (McIllwaine et al., 2011). According to the most recent report, more than half identified language as their main

[37] This remark is only valid for the participants who took part in this study, and not for the all Latinos currently living in London.

problem, even more than housing, immigration status and badly paid jobs (2011). Improving their literacy was one of their main concerns, more than changing their migration status or finding a better-paid job. My findings were similar: women reported that regardless of the time they had spent in the UK, language was one of their biggest burdens. When discussing their level of literacy and the impact on their day-to-day, words such as "despair", "frustration", "helpless", "lost" and "embarrassed" were used. This is the account of Fabiola (31, Bolivian), a cleaner in South London:

> *When I arrived I did not speak a word of English, nothing, nothing. I felt so impotent not being able to communicate with others, with an English speaking person. I felt like a fool and so embarrassed. I do not know if everyone feels the same, but for me this is the worst. Now I do speak a little, but I encourage myself that someday I will learn, step by step. I try not to worry too much because at least I can communicate some things, but at the beginning it was terrible, a nightmare* (Fabiola, 31, Bolivian).

This lack of confidence is similar to what Amalia (38, Bolivian), a former nursing student, experienced. As a hairdresser, she was the only participant who had an occupation that forced her to interact with clients in English, which made her work even more difficult. She had been doing this for the past seven years and was now familiar with the jargon, though she usually needed help or sign language in order to be sure of understanding what their clients wanted.

> *I am still very insecure about it; when you do not have full command of the language you are afraid all the time of saying something wrong or inappropriate. The insecurity demoralises you (...) this insecurity is killing me, it is terrible* (Amalia, 38, Bolivian)

It is possible to presume that this lack of literacy is one of the reasons why Latinas end up in low-skilled occupations where speaking the language is not an issue. The main way of advertising manual occupations among the community is by word of mouth - Latinos usually prefer to 'help' those from the same background - so in the UK jobs are found through a friend or acquaintance who already has a cleaning position, thus perpetuating the chain. This also explains why they do not need to use job websites or write CVs, which are difficult without the required language skills. This was how almost all my participants had managed to find jobs where a lack of English was not an issue, and were in general able to make a living. Nonetheless, they were perpetuating this vulnerability without being able to leave the circle, to the point where even cleaners' supervisors are now required to speak Spanish too. Nonetheless these apparently fast and easy choices do have consequences, particularly for their self-esteem, as in Juana's case:

> *The first days were really hard because I never ever in my life had to do something like this [work as cleaner]. My ex-husband had a very good economic situation in Colombia, I had a maid, people that did everything for me, I had my car and I came here and my first job was to clean bathrooms. I cried for weeks* (Juana, 56, Colombian)

Juana's experience is not isolated and cleaning was the main occupation for this group almost without exception, whether they worked in houses, offices, students' accommodation or institutions. The cleaning market had also reacted to this phenomenon, and these women have managers who speak Spanish even though they are from England. Furthermore, the companies that sell the cleaning service do not ask them for work permits and also do not offer legal contracts, which increases these women's vulnerability, with experiences of abuse and exploitation again confirming their status as marginalised and vulnerable.

#### 4.2.1.1 Layers of vulnerabilities: Carolina's experience

However, a lack of English is problematic in many more contexts because it is the beginning of more profound disadvantages and vulnerabilities. For example, they constantly need the assistance of others, usually to act as an interpreter, causing delays in appointments or access to services, or simply leading them to avoid these situations. An example of this is Carolina, the woman with a child abandoned by her boyfriend in Spain, who left for London where a friend offered help. She had a Spanish passport and, by the time of the interview, she had been in the UK with her son, Alberto (9) for six months. Her older son, Alfonso (16), had refused to leave Madrid and she had preferred to split the family so he could to stay with friends while she sorted out her situation in London. The following is the account of an observation with Carolina of her final opportunity for an appointment at a Job Centre. She had missed her previous appointment because she did not understand the letter and could not find anyone to translate it. Another meeting had also failed because the centre did not provide a translator.

This time I, the researcher, offered to fulfil that role. This was because she had been planning to come since November, but previously they failed to find a translator for her. The first time, she thought she could do it by herself, but didn't understand a word of what they were saying and missed out on the opportunity to get a free place on an English course. Five months had passed since then and this was the second and last time she could make a case to apply for any benefits. In the Job Centre the person behind the desk looked at her file and then decided to ignore her completely. Instead he asked me directly "what on earth" she was pretending to do in the UK without knowing the language, without family support or connections, and with a kid that

should have been in school months ago. I was unsure of how to translate this, but Carolina could tell he was complaining and she looked down, embarrassed. She later told me she knew this was a mistake, but she needed to carry on. The man said there was possibly work for her, as a cleaner and shelf-filler, but it was mandatory to know some English and thus she couldn't apply. He said that there was nothing he could do for her if she was not doing anything to improve her situation, like going to English classes. Carolina asked me to reply that this is very difficult with a child, as she had nobody to look after him while she was in classes. He replied she needed to seek help in the Job Centre at Elephant and Castle as there might be more jobs available for Spanish speakers, given the number of Latino people in the area. He also agreed to call and get her a place on an English course, but if she failed to attend that would be her last opportunity with this or any other Centre, and the end of any benefit application. Carolina's situation was tricky as in order to attend these classes she needed to find a school for her child, but it was the middle of term, and he did not speak a word of English either.

When deciding to migrate to London, some of the participants' motives had been to learn English or to improve their careers, for which literacy was also crucial. Nonetheless, they were not prepared for the situation and the general approach was to deal with it as it came, or not dealing directly with it at all. Furthermore, English was not considered a problem before they came to the UK as there were some unrealistic expectations that friends and family would help with the process, or that literacy would "come naturally" (as some of them described it to me) due the fact they were living in an English-speaking country. Some of them also planned to attend English classes in their spare time, although given their occupations and responsibilities this was rarely achieved.

There was great variety in the classes they could take in terms of quality and schedules. For example, the free ones were more accessible as they were usually held at night, but they were poor in content and frequency. The teachers were mostly Latinos, so the time was not spent with a native speaker and they reported that discussions and questions were usually carried on in Spanish, diminishing the time they spent practising. On the other hand, the better classes, with native English teachers, had the disadvantage of being more expensive and lengthier, so they needed to have an entire morning or afternoon free - hence less appealing when combined with hectic work schedules. They were also problematic for people like Carolina who needed to manage her family and job situations first. Overall it is not that there is a lack of willingness to learn, but it appears that the classes are not accessible for people with this specific kind of need. This all adds up to the importance that technologies such as the internet can acquire when people have no English literacy. New media offer tools to translate, to look for information that

otherwise is more difficult to obtain, and to reach media in their native language - even online English courses.

#### 4.2.1.2 Online translators, a problematic fast track

Not being able to speak the language is problematic to different extents, with social, cultural and financial consequences, for example: limited job options, continual need for help, such as translators for appointments or someone to speak for them in day-to-day situations, problems in carrying out ordinary tasks such as opening a bank account, and so forth. Limited social networks are also part of the picture as these migrants have minimal interaction with non-Spanish speakers and, in the cases of these women, do not belong to a large or strong Latino community. Furthermore, they do not understand the English media, so they also fail to engage with news and have reduced entertainment options, which is one of the reasons why many of them had decided not to invest in a television. Overall, they live in a society they do not fully understand and as a consequence they do not integrate into it, increasing their level of marginalisation.

In this context using new technologies such as the internet becomes helpful. As previously discussed, from a constructivist point of view, people make use of their social and cultural context to take what they consider suitable and what makes sense in their own context (see Anderson and Tracey, 2001; Hine, 2000; Miller and Slater, 2000). Therefore, some of the internet practices of my participants arose from their own difficulties and were a response to them, for example, to translate and 'fill gaps', as in Valeria's situation. She had been looking for a room for her and her son on the popular website "Gumtree". Her current landlord had increased the price of her room twice in four weeks and as her English was poor she was frustrated that she has not been able to argue with him properly. She expressed that she was desperate to leave and find new accommodation, so went online to look for rooms. She used the translator tool on her computer to explore the site in Spanish. Yet it was still problematic to call asking for more information or to arrange to visit the place without speaking English.

The translator tool on the navigator was of great help for many of them to access sites in English, although in this case it was neither a permanent nor a sustainable solution. It helped them to explore sites, but not necessarily to make use of the information. Another tool that was popular among participants was Google Translate, an application that translates and offers a voice system where users can hear the correct pronunciation. Berta was among those using it. As a biologist and former PhD student, she was preparing for the UK citizenship test. During her eight months of preparation, she spent most of the time translating the entire study booklet

with this tool. She did this on one of the computers of Casa Latina, so I witnessed how she translated and emailed the entire online test with the correct answers. She said that she did it to have a complete record of her improvements as well as of the study material in her own language, and would then memorise the answers in English. Contradictorily, she had interrupted her PhD in Bolivia because English was one of the requirements, and this, among other reasons, had made her decide to come to the UK. Her plans changed along the way and she married an English man, and settled in London indefinitely. As a former postgraduate student, she was familiar with the internet, so she felt confident using it to cope with this obstacle.

Antonia (38, Ecuadorian) a mother of two, faced the responsibility of helping her children with their homework. Being illiterate in English, she found the task impossible, but the use of the translator helped her to achieve it:

> *The computer [with internet] is of great help because with the children I need to use books and that it is not enough for me, I need to know the sounds of the words as well. Imagine my daughter has to do homework and it is difficult for me because here [England] they write in one way, but the pronunciation is in another. So I put it in Google Translate and you can hear how you should pronounce it. It is very interesting because my daughter needs to practise the dictation for school and before I was saying things to her in one way, but the teacher in another, so she was failing.* (Antonia, 38, Ecuadorian)

Antonia's digital journey started when she realised that she did was not competent in English. This hampered her roles both as mother and citizen, being unable to speak for herself and usually asking help from others, even her children. She, like other participants, started to learn how to use the internet in a foreign land and to rely on it for many of these domestic tasks, such as translation, making appointments - anything to avoid speaking in English. She started to devote her limited time to learning how to deal with these situations on the computer, rather than to learning English (a perhaps longer-term, if more complete, solution). This proves to be a short-term solution, since she can manage certain tasks, but in the long run not others. This is especially problematic if she expects to settle in the country and not be part of a disadvantaged group.

It appeared that some of my participants compensated for their lack of traditional literacy by domesticating the internet as is constructed on the basis of some of these vulnerabilities. By devoting their time and efforts to the technology they were not forced to explore other long-term options that would permit them to integrate more fully to society, such as learning English.

Hence in this adverse context there is a link between internet construction and marginalisation, as the digital competencies they develop, instead of integrating them into society, result in increasing exclusion.

### *4.2.2 Housing and internet access*

Vulnerability has many layers, and poor-quality accommodation is one of these. In this project, this point is relevant because it reveals how these women live and, more importantly, where technology is located. There are a number of elements that can be drawn out from here, since according to domestication theory the household is the main place where people accommodate and give meaning to technology (Silverstone and Hirsch, 1992; Silverstone and Haddon, 1996). The location of devices also provides an insight into access, demands, patterns of use and decision-making processes (Bakardjieva and Smith, 2001; Bakardjieva, 2005; Russo, 2006). Many of the interviews were conducted in participants' households in order to gain first-hand knowledge of their living situations and to see where they accessed the internet. However, by the time of the fieldwork not all participants had internet access at home, but used public places such as libraries or community centres.

Latina women usually knew someone in the city before arriving and this contact frequently accounted for the first place where they lived. On some occasions they extended their stay as long as possible due to financial problems. One of the more extreme living conditions I encountered in this group was Vivian's. She had been sleeping on a friend's sofa for more than a year because, she argued, she preferred to spend as little as possible and was choosing not to have a permanent home. She was living with a Latino couple that also sublet their only bedroom to a fourth person in order to make a profit, so they and Vivian were cohabiting in the living room of a flat in Hackney. Since they all worked as cleaners, they had different and quite extreme schedules so, according to her, the four were rarely at home at the same time, which made things slightly easier.

Vivian's interview took place in the flat where she was currently living. We met at 8.30 a.m. in Piccadilly Circus after her second shift of the day, and we took the tube and then the bus to Hackney. None of her flatmates were around, though it smelled like a group of people was gathered there shortly before we arrived. The place looked untidy and overcrowded, but they had some furniture. The living room had a sofa bed and a TV, and there was a small dining table next to the kitchen, with a laptop on it and some clothes and a collection of free newspapers. While making space for us to sit and have a cup of tea, Vivian showed me the laptop that they all share and asked me whether it was possible to Skype with more than two

persons at once. She looked very keen on this. When sitting at the table, I realised that in one of the corners they had fitted a very narrow desk with an old PC on it. It was not easy to find, as it was covered with dust and some old newspapers, clothes and books. It was clear they had not used it in a while and Vivian said she was unsure whether it was working.

In Vivian's flat, accessing the internet was one of the most important activities. For her it was the only way she could see her daughter, and maintaining visual contact with her two-year-old was very important. It was her way of mothering through the net, as she saw her regularly while her own mother tidied up before going to school. We did not discuss the family situation of the other tenants, but, from her account, the laptop was also the main way they communicated with their families and friends abroad. The mobility of the device, since they had wireless internet, made the process easier because they could sneak privacy and have it near them during other activities. For example, Vivian chatted with her family in Colombia in her lunch break, when she would go home and position the laptop on the table while she was eating (as if she had company, which she actually had). The laptop was more practical, as well as more up-to-date than the desktop computer, which could explain why this had ended up forgotten and used as a 'shelf', almost invisible and apparently with no intention of ever being used as a computer again. Among my participants, laptops tended to be more popular than desktop computers because of their convenience in terms of space needed and mobility. However I did encounter a couple of families that used desktop computers for practising computer skills and learning the basics before moving on to a laptop.

PCs have a story engraved on them and the fact that some families keep them even though they are not in use is also relevant, as in Andrea's (34, Bolivian) case. Her family of five lived in a two-bedroom council flat and the first computer she ever had was a desktop PC that she built piece by piece over time. She started with a flat monitor she found in a bin at the office where she works as a cleaner, then a couple of weeks later she found a keyboard. Later her husband decided to buy a mouse and a CPU. They installed it in her son's bedroom and as they could not afford an internet connection they let the youngsters use it solely for games. After she had her third baby, they decided to get extra cash through renting a spare bed in that bedroom and did not relocate the PC. The computer was used less and less because of the tenant, so they invested in a laptop. Andrea was very happy to discover that they could search for an internet signal, and finally they found that one neighbour had an unprotected one. However the only signal was at one corner of the kitchen, so that became the main place for the laptop. So, although the computer could still be moved around easily, it was kept in that corner because that was the only place where they had free online access.

As in Andrea's case, participants tended to perceive the computer mainly as internet access, without considering the other potentialities of the device. Their constructions of the hardware, the affordances they perceive from it, related solely to its software applications and they domesticate it accordingly. Because through the internet it is possible to access other media content, such as television and radio, to have all this on one device was a major advantage for them, especially in restricted living circumstances. When the places they rented did not have access they looked for alternatives. Cindy (39, Bolivian), for example, had a desktop computer, which was a reminder of better times when she had her own flat in Spain. Now she was living in a small room in Brixton with her sons, Dani (5) and Luigi (14). They shared a one-bedroom council flat with another family of two. Despite the minimal space in the flat, there were two modern desktop computers with flat screens, one bought by Cindy and the other belonging to the family they shared with. The only way she had of going online at home was when the son of the owner allowed them to use the cable connection, for which they needed to move her computer to her neighbours' room. That happened only when the owner was not at home, so they had limited time. This kind of extreme living experience shows how for migrants the role of the internet is crucial as a point of access to a different world from the one they are experiencing. Therefore it seems that they are able to abandon, for a moment, their disadvantages and to actually have fun watching a movie, chatting with friends, and continuing with rituals that provide them comfort.

#### 4.2.2.1 Internet & family roles: Antonia and the house with two computers

As has been pointed out in gender and internet literature, women are at a disadvantage when using new technologies, which also means that access can remain problematic even when the questions of housing and home connections are resolved. This is what happened to Antonia, a married woman and mother of two who lives in a two-bedroom council flat in Brixton with her Latino husband. Her technological experiences mirror family structure and power divisions that ultimately are reflected in the computer's location and accessibility.

> ***Isabel:*** *When during your day do you use the computer?*
> ***Antonia:*** *Well, generally on Saturdays and during weekdays just when I have no clothes to wash and after the kids do all their homework, then I can use it for about two hours.*

Antonia's priorities were her family and home: the place should be clean, no household chores should remain, and the kids must have done their homework as well; only then would she allow herself time to use the computer, which is in concordance with other empirical research done on women who are part of a patriarchal culture (Choudhury, 2009). Therefore it was no

coincidence that, during the interview, she stated that her children had priority for use of the computer for homework, since education is a priority in many of the Latino families, and mothers tend to perceive the internet as a powerful educational tool (Bird and Jorgenson, 2002; Goh, 2013). Nonetheless, during my observations I was able to see how the children used the computer not just for homework, but also for entertainment and to access cartoons and movies. When she asked them for some time, in order to show me how the PC was organised, it took her at least ten minutes and some crying to negotiate access, which in this case was forced by the fact they had 'a guest in the house', as she explained to her children. They had total control and even ownership of the computer, and to some extent it was possible to doubt whether she would have been as convincing when the family had no spectators, forcing them to change their routine for a moment. This is not new in the internet literature, and researchers have reflected on how children have priority of use in the house (Bakardjieva, 2006). In the particular case of Antonia this also can be explained by the fact that women are usually late adopters (Wajcman 2007): in other words, Antonia approached computers and gained digital skills after the rest of the family, positioning her as the least computer-aware member of the household and endorsing a power structure where they know more and also dictated the usage rules. Her limited skills were also explained by the few opportunities she had during the day to actually develop them – another factor that has been previously found in studies of gender and technology (Ono, 2003). This is even more accentuated in those women who have children (Burke, 2001). In fact it became clear to me that she could only have access to the computer at night, not just because the cleaning and the homework were done, but also because this was the time she was allocated, when they were not awake to potentially use it.

> ***Isabel:*** *I can see you have two computers at home, which of them do you use?*
> ***Antonia:*** *Only the one in the living room is for my use and for the children. The one in the bedroom is exclusively for my husband. He is always working on very important things, so it is just for him.*

Antonia's account of the distribution of computers at home, as well the time allocated, describes her position in the family, and that in terms of internet use she has the lowest priority, as has been confirmed in studies of mothers (Bakardjieva, 2006). This is highlighted by the fact that her husband had 'exclusive' access to one of them, which could be interpreted as signifying that what she does on it is not as important as what her husband does; therefore she has to share the other computer with the children. What is interesting is that in comparison with other participants, Antonia is in the most technological household as she lives in a house with not one but two home computers with internet connections. Yet despite these assets, her internet time remained limited and constrained by other members of the family. One of the factors that could

help to explain this unfortunate outcome is that the construction of gender in Latin America is strongly linked to patriarchal values and beliefs, and that despite the fact that Antonia and her family now live in a new and more open culture, her values and those of her Ecuadorian husband remain generally the same and are therefore replicated in their home abroad. This also means that Antonia's responsibilities as the main carer for the house and the children remain intact, which inevitably has an impact on the nature and extent of her engagement with the internet (Bakardjieva, 2006; Helsper, 2010). This case also highlights the importance of the context-specific nature of domestication, where cultural and social aspects have to be taken into account in the analysis, as someone could easily be misled by the technological equipment in Antonia's household rather by her role in the family and the power structures that are attached to it.

### *4.2.3 Isolation and cultural clashes*

As reviewed in the migration and transnational literature, those who change countries face a number of challenges. Interacting with new/different cultural codes and means of communication are among these. So it is no surprise that participants expressed the feeling that becoming part of British society had not been easy for them, especially because of clashing cultures. In their accounts, for Latinos the expression of feelings and physical contact are important components in their communications with others and in the relationships they establish. Their isolation and lack of literacy usually inhibited them in establishing relationships or to being close to British people. Therefore their impressions were based on stereotypes and scant encounters, as well as experiences of feeling disapproved of by others. Thus they characterised the British as the opposite of them: 'cold' people with great respect for the other's space and very discreet about emotions. Consequently, these women said they felt especially lonely and misunderstood in their everyday interactions.

> *[London's people] are really cold, when I am sad and I need a hug here I do not have anyone to hug me. I miss that "come on for a coffee, for a tea, let have a chat about trivial things, let have a laugh together" sort of invitation. Here people simply do not care about others, but us [Latinos] in general we are so attentive, but here it is not permitted to behave in that way* (Marta, 40, Chilean)

> *Life here is hard, really hard. One of the disadvantages here is that people do not care so you are basically alone, by yourself; it is not like in Colombia where you have your*

> *neighbours who are also your friends. Here, no, the environment is so different, it is like, no… and everyone works and everyone are terribly busy* (Paula, 68, Colombian)

Marta (40, Chilean) and Paula (68, Colombian) interpreted the lack of emotional expression or great respect for someone else's privacy as a plain lack of emotions and interest. According to their cultural codes and understanding, people should be naturally asking about personal aspects of their lives and doing something if they saw them perhaps as sad or alone. Marta expressed that what was considered "normal" behaviour for her was "not permitted" in England, which confirmed to her that this was not where she belonged. This kind of attitude did not make life easier for Paula either. She also noticed how her own relatives were behaving more distantly, which could be interpreted as a result of an acculturation process. These different cultural codes were the first and most obvious things that reminded my participants of their condition as foreigners.

Their social networks were rather limited. Their face-to-face communication was mainly with family members and co-workers, although sometimes Latino flatmates and other acquaintances were involved. Language restrictions were an obstacle, which increased their social isolation. Although there were some community centres, their attendance was restricted by the working hours imposed by their jobs, which are also fragmented across the day. The exceptions were two groups exclusively dedicated for elderly Latinos, who also happen to have more free time. This is how some of the subjects of the research were familiarised with Latin America Elderly Project (LAEP) and with *Años Dorados* (Golden Years). Both provide a space for elderly Latinos to meet up once a week. Nonetheless, many, like Marta, were not part of the target age-groups for this and she had no way to find help to cope with her loneliness and feelings of being misunderstood. In some cases the migrants' loneliness was accentuated by their economic conditions, by uncertainties about their future, their visas, the question of how much time they would spend in the UK and whether they would return home. Overall, these elements turn life into constant emotional stress.

#### 4.2.3.1 Overcrowded but alone: Victoria's story

Victoria (46, Colombian) was reluctant to go to the UK. As presented earlier, to leave her only daughter alone in order to live with her husband was a major decision for her. She came not just to be with her husband, who was complaining of feeling alone, or because her marriage was perhaps in danger. She also came in the hope of work, of learning English and of gaining experience that would help her to improve her job prospects when back in Colombia, especially given her lack of education and opportunities to finish school. Besides the distance from her

daughter, Victoria had been coping with other difficulties, such as two demanding jobs as a cleaner, and the fact she had, for the first time, to share a house where she and her husband rented a small room, with a strange family of five.

In this room they had no radio or television. Nonetheless, there was an old notebook computer, belonging to Victoria's partner, which had helped them as a distraction. This touched on other aspect of internet use, such as access to media content and entertainment options that they could fully understand: also reminders of better times. This is why soap operas, movies and websites from their home country were preferred. These helped them to cope with isolation and also with difficult living conditions, especially when living in a restricted space.

Victoria's husband invited her to watch Colombian football games, and she accepted although this was not the most interesting thing for her. Later she started to ask about soap operas and news from Cali, a town in Colombia. He showed her how she could access these and, to make it easier, created shortcuts and icons on the desktop, as well as in the internet navigation bar so she knew where to click. Even her limited knowledge enabled her to get onto the internet and to click on the menu bar for direct access. This was how she started her domestication process:

> *[I use it] as a television more than as a computer, I watch the news and soap operas (...) I use it to entertain myself and to not feel so alone. (...) [When doing it] I feel as if I am in my country, at my home watching soaps (...) I feel like with company, and when it finishes and I come back to reality I get so nostalgic because when doing this I literally get transported to Colombia.* (Victoria, 46, Colombian)

Soap operas and news from Colombia helped Victoria to cope with her feelings of loneliness and provided her with ontological security. The ritualistic aspect of her 'viewing' was of great comfort. Then, although experiencing a new life separated from her daughter for the first time, she was 'transported' to her old living room, consuming the same media content she used to watch in her home country. Furthermore she felt as if she "had company" and was no longer isolated. Perhaps this was because she could understand the language, the narrative, and more importantly the cultural codes and unspoken language behind the plot, which provided her with a sense of proximity so much needed in a transnational context. While watching these programmes, she stopped being the illiterate immigrant who lived far away from her daughter and cohabited in a small room. Instead she was 'in' her living room back home and again the housewife with a calm life and her child in the next room. However, this was a temporary feeling that only lasted until the programme finished and she was no longer transported by it.

The device was perceived not as an internet connection, but as something much richer, stressing the versatility of the technology that for her took the form of a television. Her construction of the device and what she took from all the possibilities were semblances of another media and of another time. So the elements of company and of feeling transported could be attributed to television, but, given these specific circumstances, were transferred to the internet as it played the role of media substitute. This is also perhaps one of the clearest examples of the three articulations - the device, the content and the symbolic context - as it was only under these circumstances that she assigned this context-specific meaning to the technology.

#### 4.2.3.2 Internet as emotional support

Another way of reducing the isolation and sense of distance was by making use of the communication tools available through the technology that provides bridges for connection with family and friends overseas. This is one of the main explanations for digital engagement in this population (Hiller and Franz, 2004; Kang, 2009; Vertovec, 2001). One of the preferred ways for these Latinas to manage their loneliness is through the use of social network sites. Participants have different levels of proficiency, but nonetheless the most relevant feature for them was the possibility of accessing friends' and family's photographs, which also gave them a feeling of proximity:

> *'As I do every day, today I saw [on Facebook] pictures of my family, I felt nostalgic and happy at the same time. There were pictures of my parents and sisters. At some point I felt the need to be with them and hug them, to tell them how much I love and miss them'* (Fabiola, 31, Bolivian).

In Fabiola's account of her experience on Facebook there are elements that reflect the Latino bonds and how important it is for them to express their emotions. However, the situation is complex because when connecting with their life overseas they also have the impression of being left out, as in Valeria's experience:

> *'Every day I look at the pictures [online] of my nephews, nieces and family and say to myself how big they are now, how fast they grow and everything that I have missed, everything I have missed from leaving Colombia and being here, watching them grow and everything, and that Latino thing of union and familiarity is something you don't find here.'* (Valeria, 40, Colombian)

Here Valeria points out how far she feels from her relatives, and questions the decisions that kept her away from them for nearly ten years. She also picks on the Latino roots ("union" and "familiarity") that are part of her beliefs, but that she does not find in her everyday life. Then Valeria, as well as other participants, looks for comfort and encouragement on the web so she can chat, write, use web cameras, see pictures and upload them, among other things. Milena summarised this, saying that "[the Internet] makes the experience of living in another country bearable". In this context of clashing cultures, lack of literacy and distance from their families, the versatility and opportunities offered online are hard to miss.

Through their digital practices they cope with social isolation and limited connections in different ways. For some the internet takes the form of a television, offering media content that is familiar and that uses their own cultural codes, such as in their favourite soap operas. For others it is a window through which they can see their home city and connect with their family and friends, especially through pictures and video-chat. These connections with their roots help them to tolerate the disadvantages, but also decrease the pressure on them to integrate into British society and create new connections. So their social networks remain limited to Spanish speakers and their media consumption is narrow. Thus it is possible to see how, through their usage of the internet, they sustain the barriers increasing their isolation.

### *4.2.4 Community centres and computer classes*

As discussed, digital literacy programmes and access provision targeted minority and migrant groups among others. That is in part the reason why two London charities for Latinos developed computer classes with the financial aid of local councils. They were also key places for recruiting participants, and this is why I here provide a first glimpse of those students from Casa Latina and Irmo. It is also worth noting that they were mostly just starting their domestication of the internet, and had very limited previous experience with new technologies. However they were no strangers to the social pressure to be part of the so-called digital world, and the potential advantages of becoming a user. Moreover, isolation leaded them to centres where they could explore their interest in technology in a more familiar and welcoming environment. They brought with them stories of missed opportunities and fears, so the task was to build up both digital skills and confidence. This was a major task for the elderly participants due to physical restrictions and chronic insecurities.

In Casa Latina classes were held weekly at mid-day, which meant students needed to have more flexible working hours. Furthermore another community centre aimed exclusively at elderly

Latinos (LAEP) had arranged for their members to take part in Casa Latina's classes. This explains why the women who attended there were mainly elderly. At Irmo, on the other hand, the classes were in the evening, providing more freedom to students, who also brought their own laptops, so the kind of participants in each place was quite different regarding age, working hours and computer ownership.

#### 4.2.4.1 Motivations and commitment in the words of Denise and Vania

Denise (68, Colombian) spent all her life working in a textile factory. It was not enough to buy a house and she felt that she was missing opportunities. She knew about a nephew who had migrated to London some years previously and decided, with two friends, to go and visit him. Secretly, she thought that if she had the chance she would not return and would stay in the UK at any cost. Therefore, she sold all her belongings and left. At first she stayed with her nephew, then found a job as a cleaner and rented a room in a house with Ecuadorian flatmates. She said she was used to financial hardships and living illegally had not been an issue yet. For her, Europe was a wise decision because in her home country the government *"did not provide the opportunities you can have here"*, particularly for the elderly.

> *I saw my nephew using the computer but that was something I could not access there [Colombia] … I wanted to learn, I wanted and I want to learn computers because it is useful for all, to be informed, to know things that are on the internet, to send messages, to receive them, to talk to my family abroad, that I would like. (*Denise, 68, Colombian)

Her keen interest in the classes could be seen in her efforts to attend and level of commitment, as she did not miss a single class. Still, as many other participants, she faced long and usually expensive commutes to get to Casa Latina. She also had to combine it with work commitments. Yet Denise valued the opportunity and made efforts to take advantage of it:

> *I need three busses to get here… and as I arrive from work that is a problem because sometimes I cannot get the bus. I wake up every day at 3.40 am, my work starts at 5 am and it takes me an hour to get there, then another hour to return to my home. I arrive at 8 or so, I have a shower, breakfast and at 9 sharp I need to be at the bus stop to get to Casa Latina* (Denise, 68, Colombian)

Some of the reasons women gave for taking part in the classes were, as expected, communication with distant family members and being up to date. There was also a special appeal in starting to use computers and the internet for the first time at an advanced age as for

many it was their first occasion to encounter technology. Furthermore they had long had pressure from their family to start using email and video-chat.

At both centres the classes were conducted in Spanish, which also explains why these women were keen to take part. They also said they felt very happy with the teachers, who were described as warm and attentive, which is something that has proved critical in previous successful classes for similarly disadvantage populations. This also compensated for the cultural clash discussed previously, so both centres became places to learn about technology in a familiar environment. Participants were grateful for the opportunity to spend a couple of hours learning about ICTs in a relaxed environment, in their own language and socialising with their fellow students and teachers Besides feeling welcome, it also helped them to cope with isolation, as can be appreciated in Vania's (85, Colombian) comments in a free writing exercise:

> *Today I have created an email account. I will use it for my classes, which have been interrupted by my illness (...) It is fabulous to have access to these programmes I [internet, Word] because I never bothered with them before. Thank you for all the interest you [teacher, assistants] show towards us, for taking into account the interests of Latino people, especially the elderly, because we feel isolated for several reasons, but especially because of the language and the warmth of our [Latino] brothers.* (Vania, 85, Colombian).

Vania was the eldest participant and the only one who was in London after claiming asylum. She used to be the mayor of a small town in the countryside of Colombia and was forced to leave by the *guerrilla* (arm forces) who threatened her and her family. Her daughter was already living in London, so helped her to set up a life abroad. Yet she left her siblings, father and long time friends behind. One of her favourite activities at home was when every other weekend her daughter sat her in front of the computer screen, located in a small living room. There she watched and spoke with the rest of the family abroad, who also gathered. She said she was too old to use the internet. However, she wants to be able to do so independently, so with the classes she was giving it a shot.

For the elderly women, this was a long haul because they faced physical impediments such as vision and coordination problems, so for example to use the computer mouse was a major task. Though classes cover basic digital skills they were not easy and therefore filled learners with anxiety and frustration. For example, they often got stuck on what, for a regular user, would be considered a simple task, such as opening the right folder or clicking on a specific icon. Phrases

like *"I am stupid"* or *"please forgive me, I am so helpless, please be patient with me"* were often heard in the room.

The classes were also a chance to confront their technological fears in a safe environment. At Casa Latina the teacher usually started every week with the same speech: *"you are not going to break this computer; this computer is here for you to learn, so use it and do not get worried if something does not work. We are going to do this together"*. Confidence was a major issue with new users, like Marta (40, Chilean). She was very much aware of the advantages of using the internet, which was why she had bought a laptop for her family. However, her teenage son and her husband kept reminding her that she did not know enough to use it. As a consequence she enrolled in the course because she wanted to use it but was afraid of doing so at home and deleting or damaging her family's files.

> *I always felt afraid of them [computers] and really wanted to learn. Then you come to the point that you say to yourself, "Enough, I need to face it" and the only way to do it is by taking the course… I am very old, and I always wonder to myself, "Why didn't I learn this earlier?"* (Marta, 40, Chilean).

Participants talked of their desire to buy a computer for themselves in order to achieve independent use and ownership of the device. The fact that they would own it in their own right would remove the fear of damaging something that was not theirs or of deleting someone else's "important files". At Irmo the picture was slightly different, since the women who attended the evening classes were younger and had more experience with computers. They also brought their own laptops to classes, as the ones provided by the centre were limited in number and quite old. Yet to some extent they shared similar fears and used devices in very limited ways, usually with the help of someone else.

## 4.3 Conclusion

One of the key features of domestication is to look at where the technology is placed, and from there to follow the interactions within family members, other technologies, and the meanings and messages negotiated in the house and with the outside. With this chapter I, on the contrary, started this outside, in the context of where these women are situated, touching on social, cultural and financial aspects of their experiences as migrants. These were crucial to framing from where technological meanings and practices arise because why and how these women use the internet is not isolated from why and how they live in London. Therefore in this overview of

their everyday existences I aimed to provide a first examination of the complexity and diversity of their situations.

I started with their reasons for going to London, as these were an opening to their expectations of the city and the sacrifices they made to achieve their goals. It also traced their interests and passions, such as looking for opportunities not provided in their home countries or a means to make money for a future house or business back at home. The financial and legal requirements to meet their ambitions were a first test. Yet these helped to understand the layers of marginalisation of their situation and to position how technologies are accessed.

Domestication started to unfold in an everyday life coloured by a strong language component. English literacy was perhaps the biggest barrier in their migration experience. It had a domino effect on their occupations, income, housing, media consumption and social networks. It also shaped the affordances they perceived on the internet and how it could become an alternative or a help in these circumstances. Still, the picture is complex because the diversity of their stories and backgrounds before London provided them with different levels of technological expertise. Consequently, despite similar difficulties there was also a variety of experiences and symbolical contexts to their usage. For example, there were women that notwithstanding this substantial change in the quality of their everyday lives attempted to continue with practices and rituals, which provided them ontological security in times of uncertainty. For others, it was the beginning of new internet practices that helped them to cope with isolation. There were also participants who for the first time encountered computers and the internet, and did so in a welcoming Latino community centre with the help of teachers. Despite this support, they had to overcome their long lasting insecurities and practical difficulties in their usage.

From their accounts I was also able to draw on gender constructions. Their responsibility as wives and mothers, and to "take care" of family members, was assumed as part of their roles. This is an element that helped me to understand the strategies behind their digital practices. It was also linked to the nature of their communications. For example, as migration and transnational literature shows, it was very important for them to maintain ties with family and friends in their home country - a reason for either take-up or continuation of their internet use.

Finally, domestication is not static or born in isolation. By providing a first deconstruction of their sociocultural context I aimed to explore interpretations and understandings that are linked to the particularities of their internet construction. So far, this has included a first layer of data that accounts for their living circumstances, motives for migration and the difficulties and

benefits encountered in London. This is also the canvas on which domestication, migration and transnationalism interact, which give rise to the particularities of the Latinas' internet.

# CHAPTER V

## (Re)Domesticating the internet in a foreign land

It has been argued that digital media changed the landscape of migration, providing the basis for the figure of the connected immigrant. These technologies also contributed to changing the landscape of the home, by bringing in transnational links that enabled an enriched discussion about the boundaries of the home. As found by previous domestication studies - particularly of migrants populations (Bakardjieva, 2005) - the boundaries of the house are no longer determined by its geographical location but by the extent of the inhabitants' connections. It has become easier for people to stay connected with family and friends who are far away, or to consume media from their home country, practices that help to shape the role of the internet in their everyday, and furthermore, how it is domesticated. Technologies, on the other hand, and particularly the internet, are no longer something completely new and unexpected. Though it still needs to be "tamed" it is also a feature of the modern world that has been present from before their migration, whether they were users or not (e.g. they had heard about it, family and friends were users, it had been discussed in the mainstream media, etc.). Therefore pressures, expectations, and new practices that are in accordance with their contexts are born.

It is in this setting that this chapter aims to take the central elements of domestication theory and look closely at how they unfold in a migration context. I will do so by discussing the moral economy, the stages of the process and articulations. Yet there is a risk from the overlapping of elements, because neither the theory nor previous research has been very clear about their distinctions. This is due to the nature of domestication which is embedded in the everyday life of users, which incorporate a series of elements – some tangible and other intangible – which are more difficult to grasp empirically and are mainly approached from participants' discourses (for example: values, norms and beliefs). Furthermore, in interviews, discourses and the narration of practices are mixed together, which is why it is advisable to combine it with another method, such as participant observation. The advantage of this choice is that it enabled me to discuss the most relevant concepts in depth, and contextualised.

The chapter is structured according to the three pillars of domestication. First I will focus on the moral economy of Latinas in London, drawing on the elements that are part of their environment, and how they influence the geography within which domestication happens. This also touches on their transnational links, either in a house or in a community centre. Then I will consider the four stages of domestication in order to highlight the richness of the process. The variety of their technological experiences led me to organise them into (a) those that started to use the internet only once they were living in a foreign country and (b) those who had been internet users prior to their migration. This exercise will allow me to analyse domestication in different lights, considering the disparities of these contexts as well as the participants' needs and desires when they started to appropriate the technology. I will also touch on the concept of collective meanings and how the internet may mean something different once the user is in a foreign land. Finally, I will focus on double and triple articulations, the messages they negotiate and the symbolic contexts of their internet consumption.

## 5.1 Business as usual? The moral economy in an immigrant community centre and a household

The moral economy is an ambitious concept that speaks of beliefs, values, culture and interactions, among other things; from reviewing the literature, it is not easy to grasp. These elements are difficult to pin down empirically, particularly because as scholars have noted the concept is not a stable and defined unit of analysis (Bakardjieva, 2006; Sorensen, 2006). Furthermore, to research domestication – in whatever setting – takes time as the method involves careful observation and formal and informal conversations with participants to shed light on their everyday lives, the norms and values that are prominent in their interactions and that also reflect the ways they interpret and appropriate technologies. It is skilled work where of necessity access to intimate spaces is needed. These aspects have to be negotiated, and added to the limits of the research – personal and physical – which can end up restraining clear observation of the moral economy. There are also further challenges; for example, when domestication and further observations are located not in a home but in a public space, such as a community centre, how is a researcher to address the moral economy of a more fluid and open arena, where there are a diversity of people that perhaps do not share similar discourses and values but that nonetheless are contributors to this economy? These are some of the challenges I faced when empirically addressing the concept of a moral economy. However, I took advantage of traces that go beyond discourse, such as informal conversations, attitudes, practices and spatial arrangements that shed light on the technological map on which the internet is located and that historically has guided other domestication researchers.

There is also another issue, which is the *translocality* of participants as they demonstrate continuous interaction with and negotiation of messages from the outside (i.e. their home country or one more culturally aligned, so to speak, with their own). However, this does not necessarily account for the public messages that domestication originally refers to. In other words, prior to digital media there was no question that the messages outside the doorstep were mainly a dialogue with the society where their houses were located. Therefore domestication theory relies on an analysis that is usually bound by geographical limits which define the participants' moral economy. This is expected to be in concordance with the immediate environment, since they negotiate public messages, beliefs and values that have their origin in society. Yet my argument is that because of the characteristics of their context this is not what really happened to these women. Although their houses were located in London, the components of their moral economy remained predominantly as they would be in their home countries. To account for these different geographies I will focus on two places of different nature, Casa Latina community centre and the household of one of the participants.

### *5.1.1 A Latino island in London*

Casa Latina is an organisation that is proud to say it has open doors for all Latinos in any situation or conditions. It provides services such as a nursery, legal and housing advice, and adult education classes. These last are of particular importance because many of the people who attend the centre are illiterate in English and therefore in great need of low-cost courses. However, in the last couple of years the staff also noticed that access to the internet was in demand. In accordance with government policies they obtained support from the local council to acquire equipment and set up computer access and classes for free. The council helped with the provision of equipment, materials and also a teacher. They appointed an English national with extensive knowledge of Spanish as well as IT. The classes took place on the second floor of a three-storey house, in the same room as the English classes. The steep stairs proved difficult for the elderly students, and sometimes classes had to be delayed by ten minutes in order to wait for everyone to be in their place. There were 20 computers, including one used by the teacher, with a connection to the projector. Only on rare occasions were all in full use at the same time.

There I never saw people sharing a computer. This was extremely relevant to the experience they have with the device and a reason why the classes have a strict limit on the number of students. The computer stations were located around the room and students faced the wall, so there were no rows, which helped to create a sort of inclusive environment. The room was quite

dark, but over the years people had put cards and drawings on the wall to bring some life to it. There was also a section with leaflets about basic computer use, offering help with installing antivirus software on laptops, and a sign with the rules for printing, which was paid for. On one of the walls was a large whiteboard, which was used in both English and computer classes.

The atmosphere in classes is like being transported to any other Latino country. No English spoken at all, all I heard was Spanish, loud and fast. For Latinos food - and sharing it - is very important: it is a way of greeting and also to express that they care. Therefore, the Latino feeling is stronger when participants arrive at the class with sweets or homemade pastries to share, which happens every week and with no particular order or organisation - everything is very spontaneous. Greetings among all who attend the classes are expressive and physical too, they hug and a kiss even if they do not know each other. Loud talk and personal questions asked openly are also common in the classroom. There was a lot of joking going on and the teacher was involved in the dynamic too. Together they managed to create a warm environment where they are among peers. Technological fears and insecurities had not disappeared yet the familiarity of the classroom helped students to relax and to approach the computer in a comfortable way, as Denise and Marta narrate:

> *[At Casa Latina] I feel more comfortable, like at home. It is also easier for me to talk to people there.* (Denise, 68, Colombian)

> *To have a pleasant teacher and classmates was very important for me. In that way you are not ashamed to ask questions, you have the confidence to do it, to ask what you don't understand. I knew I would be listened to and that they would have patience with me.* (Marta, 64, Colombian)

Internet tasks were centred on their favourite topics of conversation, such as their experiences in London, and about their home countries and the differences among them in terms of traditions and words. Something that particularly amused students was explaining these to the teacher and talking about aspects of their culture, from geography to kitchen recipes. These were the kind of things they had to look up in YouTube or in Google News to later show to the class. London, and for that purpose the internet, took a backseat and their countries, families and traditions took over the conversation. They were also reflected in the subjects they expressed interest in learning, such as looking for particular towns or setting up a Skype account. Hence the moral economy that it is impregnated in the class is linked to an outside that is geographically far away but digitally close. Although they cannot shut down the public messages from mainstream

society, the negotiation of these elements is particularly attached to their roots and home experiences, converting this classroom into a small Latino island.

Before classes was when most of the contact among students took place, and there were also more freedom of activities and socialisation. The latter was the reason for Leticia (83, Colombian) to arrive earlier, as she said she felt lonely and stressed and wanted to be with people. She had a computer at home but she didn't know how to use it. I helped her to open a blank page in Word so she could write to her nephew. She said that she missed him so much, and started to tell me how yesterday she bought a washing machine and a fridge for his family back at home. She did this online, and a neighbour (who is also from Colombia) helped her with the purchase. Leticia started to write something in the Word document, but she claimed she didn't know what to write. I recommend her to write him an email instead, but she didn't have his address. In the meantime she was writing everything down in a small notepad. She explained to me that she gets very anxious when using the computer so she needs to write notes to remember it later. This was a practice widespread among students, usually delaying the class because they wanted to write it down exactly, word for word. Twenty minutes later Leticia had written two lines and saved and closed the document in her folder. She said she was done yet she spent most of the time chatting with me or looking at the screen. This is for me an indicator that despite her interest in technology, her main reason for coming to the class and arriving early was to share with other Latinos and to be in community, the social aspect of it. This is also a reflection of their precarious social network and situation, which is an element in the moral economy providing the basis of interactions.

#### 5.1.1.1 Marta and the Latino bonding

Marta (40, Chilean) was among the regular students that usually arrived early. She could be described as one of the more enthusiastic and open students, usually making comments and jokes. Students were fond of her, particularly for her light character and usual smile. Though she was very open about Chile and her experiences in Santiago and London, none of them knew about her personal story because she didn't share it - not even that Marta was not her real name. Nor did she share anything else family related, just that she has one kid and a husband that not allow her to use the family laptop, arguing she will break it. Hence nobody knew that when she and her family arrived in Heathrow Airport in 2005, the UK Border Agency gave them only 48 hours to remain in the country. After that they should leave, because they were suspected of seeking permanent residency rather than coming for a family holiday as they stated. They did not leave and three months later the police detained her 16 years old. After a week in jail he was deported back to Chile. That was the night of 23rd of December, the worst Christmas Marta can

remember since her daughter passed away, after 10 years with brain paralysis. This was the reason why she swore never to set foot back in the country where her little girl died. She managed to arrange for the teenager to come back by an undisclosed way via France. Yet months later her husband was deported and this time it took them nine months before the family was again reunited in London. The night her husband was sent to Chile, she recalls, it was the first time she had to use the internet and, with the help of a friend, to book a hotel room for him.

Marta spent her time in London between cleaning offices and Casa Latina. There she was keen on performing as many activities as she could before the classes.

> *[I come to Casa Latina] for several reasons. Because it is a way to meet people, to practice English, I see different kinds of people, but mainly it is for the computer and the classes. It helps me to remain active, to not think about my life and all the problems I have, so I like to be here constantly learning, acting, helping people* (Marta, 40, Chilean).

Marta looked comfortable in this context. She also reported enjoying the relaxed Latino environment that she missed, as she was allowed to be loud and to offer advice to others. Her free attitude also contributed to the feeling of relaxation and familiarity that made the place distinctive. In the twenty minutes prior to class she asked for help with Skype, but the computer did not allow it. Then she switched quickly to an English online test about computers and commands. She didn't know the answers about the function of the keys so started guessing. In the meantime she chatted with other women, commenting that nobody writes letters any more and they need an email to talk to friends. She also offered help and went around computers helping students with Word documents. Then went to her seat to play an online game, while she commented that she would like to do that at home but her husband did not allow her to. Finally she accessed her email and asked for my help to change the resolution of a picture she wanted to attach to an email, but the server still rejected it because of the size. She also looked genuinely happy that she had seven unread emails. Finally the teacher arrived. Marta looked at me and asked about my fieldwork notes. She asked me to write about how good she is at using the computer.

To be outspoken about certain aspects of their lives, the relationships with their families, and to talk loudly as if they were among close friends made sense here. It did because the rules that operate in Casa Latina are dictated by the unity of people who claim they usually feel out of place. This is also a place where there is no shame in recognising that they do not know how to do something. On the contrary –and this is usually stressed by the teacher – they are allowed to

mess with the computer, and they need to leave their fears outside and enjoy it. There was also solidarity in terms of listening to each other, commiserating over problems such as loneliness, sharing their experiences as foreigners and also trying to have a good time. Therefore the group begins to unite and seemed that friendships were starting to be forged. However, these were not taken outside the classroom and did not survive outside this situation because of their schedules and great distances. This also says something about their context and the other worries that constrain them from maintaining stronger ties, such as in Marta' case. Still there is a culture of sharing and support that permeates their interactions while on the course.

Regarding their relationship with the technology, my attention was drawn to Marta's short attention span and constant change of activities. Yet it made sense, considering this was the moment for her to try without fear or restrictions. Specifically, the kind of problems she experienced with email attachments (downloading, or sending pictures) were common to many of the participants, not only in the class but in this entire study, because sending and receiving pictures is one of the most important activities, along with news, email, writing letters and playing. Although it is not possible generalise, there was a pattern related to different kinds of connections to their hometowns and families. This supports the argument of a moral economy strongly rooted in their home countries and in their experiences as immigrants. In combination with other elements these limit their social networks and their social integration, making the internet a device for developing ties that go beyond the communication stream. In this context it was a social experience and a channel for them to share their interests and backgrounds in a secure environment. The moral economy of Casa Latina, then, was one fed by Latino heritage, and this is the main motivation for them attending classes and domesticating the internet.

### *5.1.2 Tales of a sheltered economy*

In my research I tried to not be tied to the community centres so I could explore different contexts for Latinas' internet construction. So I would like now to describe the moral economy in a different setting, that is, in Elena's house[38]. She was originally one of the Casa Latina students though she started later in the term so attended just a few classes. She was receptive of the study and proud to show me her laptop, so agreed to being observed and interviewed her in her home.

[38] As explained on the methodology chapter, when conducting observation inside participants' houses I faced several limitations. Consequently in sketching the moral economy from the data available, inevitably gaps will be left. Nonetheless I still decided to incorporate this account because it sheds new light and enriches the discussion.

As soon as I entered I noticed it was decorated with a multitude of ornaments and vintage furniture. Windows and every table were covered by delicately embroidered cloths. It also had natural light and the sun was coming in, which gave a comforting feeling. At the side of the living area there was a small dining table with an open laptop on it. Someone was speaking in Spanish on the television. The table had only two chairs, where Elena and I sat to chat, with the laptop open, while sharing a cup of tea. She also offered me some of her latest homemade pastries. Her daughter, a woman in her fifties, was sitting on the sofa looking at the television, behind Elena and facing me. Despite my explaining and showing my student credentials, her daughter was suspicious of my presence in her elderly mother's home. She also said she didn't understand why Elena had to sign an informed consent but she allowed this. I was also relieved that she let me tape the interview. Yet she countered questions and advised her mother not to answer those she considered too personal. Elena looked uncertain and tried to mediate, but it was difficult for her not to follow her daughter's lead, as she is used to doing.

Despite the interruptions and interventions, I decided to include the interview and observations because I think they reflect the fears and concerns that to some extent permeate their interactions with strangers, tending to limit their relationships to a small, closed circle. It is also to be expected that in a house different rules will operate compared with a community centre: it is a different level of intimacy and therefore to have a stranger there observing is quite intrusive, whatever her or his nationality. Her worries were understandable as they live in a strange country, coexisting with many cultures and with other kinds of danger. These attitudes also speak of their beliefs and positions in the household as family members, such as the relationship that Elena has with her daughter and how much she relies on her.

This is a flat inhabited by an elderly woman who lives alone, although she has a close relationship with her oldest daughter who also lives in London. Technologies such as television and the internet have a predominant place in the living room. The laptop, although moveable, is usually located on the main table. She started to use it only after she moved countries; it was a gift from her daughter so she could be connected with the family abroad. Therefore, its main use was for communication, although she also enjoyed other activities like watching Colombian soap operas. She also acquired a satellite dish to watch Spanish and Mexican television because she did not understand English. Therefore she was relying on both devices to be connected with the outside, and limiting to some extent the kind of messages she received. For example, she did not watch or search for local news because the locality with which she feels more related is actually a foreign one, reinforcing this circle of marginalisation. Although she attends some

social activities in LAEP she has no friends besides her relatives and her interactions are limited to her daughter and to other family members in the UK and abroad.

> *I related mainly with my daughters, I also have a great-grandson… and well also people from the computer class. We speak the same language so I have a good time, I laugh with them* (Elena, 76, Colombian)

Elena had Messenger, Skype and Facebook accounts, though these are not evidence of confidence in using the internet because the daughter created them for her. She also helped Elena to set up her desktop screen, where she has only two icons: Messenger and Skype. I saw that typing was not a problem for her: she said it is because she worked as a secretary for over three decades and was used to typewriters. In fact, she types rapidly and almost without looking at the keyboard, despite her advanced age. However, her challenge was entering the websites. She went to Windows Explorer to open her Hotmail account, although she could check her emails with a direct link from Messenger on the desktop. In the meantime she chats with her daughter about why she chose that particular username and how other close members of the family have similar ones that combine surname and year of birth. She became confused because someone had logged in before and therefore the default address was not hers. The mouse also posed difficulties and by mistake she wrote her password in the username line, and told me it was her name so that she would not forget it. She entered her email, and when I pointed out she had ten unread mails she asked me how I knew that. Then she asked if she had to click or double-click to open them.

I could see she uses the laptop only for internet purposes as she doesn't use any other kind of application on the computer, and not to save or organise pictures. In the navigator she had one link to “El Cartel TV”, a Colombian website with links to all the current soap operas and other Colombian TV shows. Her daughter set that up so she could open it easily, as was the case with other participants. Then she went to Google and typed “Caracol News” in order to see the local newspaper, while she told me about “Mundo” and “El Tiempo”, two other favourites. A window popped up with an advertisement - probably from “Caracol” or “El Cartel TV” - but she did not close it. She returned to Messenger by mistake and I could see she has 59 contacts; she explains that many of them are family who are abroad.

Despite her daughter’s support she was afraid of breaking the computer so she wanted to attend the classes to learn how to use it. The daughter also encouraged her to use the internet without fear. Then she wanted to show me her Facebook account, but didn’t know how to get there, asked the daughter and then went to Google again where she typed ‘Facebook’. She said she

logs in occasionally to look at the pictures. While she is doing it she looked hesitant and asked me if that was ok; she had the same difficult as she had with her email. I could see that the majority of her 'friends' are also family members, and she told me she had never sent a friendship invitation.

Overall Elena's problems accessing accounts and handling the device result from her not using them regularly. This is also why she had not developed a familiarity with them. These, then, are available but not part of her routine - what she really likes are the news and soap operas from Colombia. The media she consumed and the majority of the messages she received were from the Colombian websites, and from television from Spanish speaking countries - none of which is related to the British mainstream media. Of course, she had to deal at some point with the reality of the country she lives in, but both language and lack of interest are major constraints. Perhaps this is clearer in her interactions with relatives, which I regret not having access to. What I can modestly conclude from my observation at her house and from the interview is that she is to some extent isolated from the mainstream society and it is through the internet and trasnantional media that she connects with a distant outside. She mainly relates to family abroad and day-to-day she is close to family members in London, plus a few people at a community centre where she nonetheless is not a regular. Her daughter encourages her to acquire skills but physical limitations and lack of practise do not help.

Despite my efforts, I could go no further with this exploration of the moral economy in the two cases of community centre and household, due to the methodological constraints encountered. I believe that these stem from the fact that my main unit of analysis were Latinas and their experiences rather than their household or the community centre. Therefore my focus was on people and their interactions with technologies, which sometimes take place in intimate spaces, and at other times in more open and communal environments. These are completely different in their characteristics and, as I exposed in this section, imply different strategies and resources to negotiate access to them. For example, to grasp the moral economy of a fluid and open environment such as the community centre, I not only had to attend regularly to have a sense of what was 'the norm' and what was 'the exception' in people's relationships and interactions, but I also had to gain a place that enabled me to become part of the environment, almost invisible, so as not to interrupt those values and habits unfolding. Moreover, as this was an immigrant community I had to bear in mind elements from both the home and the host society to make my observations more accurate, so that I was able to identify the difference between how the moral economy runs when they are among equals and when the social norms and values from the host country are remembered. This was perhaps the most difficult aspect when trying to address this concept empirically in a semi-public space.

A completely different story unfolded when the study was conducted in the intimacy of a household. As my attention was on one member of the family, and familiarity and trust was gained with that member, when going to a place where there are other relatives present, who are also part of the household, I realised I was also interrupting their intimacy. The problem is that the closeness achieved with my informant is not easily or automatically passed from her to another member of the family, so the other person had to deal literally with a stranger in the home. This problem and the resources needed to deal with it are a source of data that speak loud and clear about values, norms and routines of such space. This was the main reason why I included the account of Elena's home. However, these factors can also interfere with the flow of the research in terms of the observations and interviews, as turned out to be the case. Yet from both experiences I can relate to Bakardjieva's (2006) remarks about the current features of moral economy, which describe it as dynamic and permeable, where habits, relationships and values face constant change. This is particularly poignant when the subject of study is migrant populations. Their moral economy is disturbed in a context of cultural clashes, where their norms and ways of interpreting life are sometimes in dissonance with the society they are living in. Although some aspects remain stable, others are adapted to the new environment, and it is during this process that the internet is viewed as an appealing tool and a valuable resource that feeds their moral economy. Therefore this empirical account of the concept may echo those more recent views that argue for a unit of analysis which is not stable, but in a constant state of change and negotiation. This was perhaps clearer to me from the experience in the community centre. With the advantage of being accepted as an equal – a fellow Latina – I could witness how their sense of belonging was demonstrated constantly in what they referred to as a safe environment. Here the internet also became a resource to achieve it, and though dynamic there were aspects of this economy than remained stable as they were based on their roots and ties as Latinos in a multicultural and foreign city.

Furthermore, my interpretation of the concept comes from its first formulations, which leads me to assume that it is related to the geographical location of the house, and therefore somehow bounded by a physical structure. In agreement with Silverstone and colleagues (Silverstone et al, 1990), I chose a household as the heart of the domestication process because it was the main environment in which devices were located, the centre of interaction with the inhabitants, and also distinct from the public space. This is also worth exploring for the sake of the double articulation, and where the messages they negotiate come from. Yet in my work the nature of this 'outside' takes on a new light in a migration context, presenting a dissonance between where the house is located and the outside they connect to, which is different from the obvious physical or geographical outside of the home, providing different kinds of connections and a

multiplicity of alternatives. Again, this is not entirely new as previous researchers from the domestication as well as other traditions have looked at the role of mobile and internet technologies (Berker et al 2006; Green and Haddon, 2009). Yet in this case it is important because the combination of vulnerability and cultural clash highlights both the agency of the inhabitants as people who, to some extent, would be able to choose the location of messages, and how the role of the technology is being shaped by these external factors. It is also relevant in this case to take a closer look at the nature of this public spectrum, because it has consequences for the role of technology and the possibilities presented to migrants. This is something I will explore in depth in the following subsections.

## 5.2 Domestication and redomestication in a transnational context: new context, new meanings?

I will now focus on how these women position themselves on their path of incorporating the internet into their everyday live. The great differences in terms of their technological experiences showed to me that there is a before and after migration. This translated into different circumstances, needs and context for those who had incorporated it because work or study required them to do so. There are also differences within their stories. For example, women who started their domestication process as migrants, but prior to arriving to London. Or others who, although they had used a computer, had never before accessed the internet, but who were now confident and accomplished users thanks to other transferable skills. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that resources, particularly education, are indicative of the nature and extent of engagement (Helsper 2010, 2011).

### *5.2.1 New to technology, but no strangers to it*

As previously described, many of my participants were immersed in a social context marked by loneliness and marginalised due their lack of English literacy. This was more damaging for those with limited social networks, such as those that did not attend Latino community centres or who worked long hours and had no time to socialise. It is also exacerbated by the geographical distance from Latin America, with the price of plane tickets too high for frequent travel. Indeed, visiting home was not possible at all for those who also faced legal problems due to their immigration status. Furthermore they were surrounded by messages that described new technologies - and particularly the internet - as the way to be connected and to be part of a digital world which moves rapidly, leaving some people behind. They all knew someone who had made use of the internet and found it a positive experience, which reinforced this message.

This is a complex scenario with many participants who at the time of the interviews had never been regular computer users and some who were almost completely computer-illiterate. There were great expectations and hopes for what could be done with the internet, along with a great deal of misinformation and a lack of awareness about online risks. Nonetheless, participants did have an opinion about what could be achieved, regardless of whether or not they had any experience. Claims such as 'the internet is everything' - as one of them argued - fuelled their intentions of becoming regular and competent users.

#### 5.2.1.1 Macarena and the missing cable

Macarena is 65-year-old Peruvian who arrived in London 13 years ago. She is one of the more vulnerable participants, those who come from a background of poverty, with limited formal education and thus lack of opportunities to make use of technologies. She is among those who are recipients of collective meanings that are negotiated in their surroundings and have influenced their enthusiasm for the internet and new technologies in general.

Macarena went to London for a limited period while working as a maid for a diplomatic family. Yet she fell in love with the city and the opportunities of a developed country. By that time her children were adults and starting their own families, so she did not feel a responsibility to return for them. Her husband was out of work so this was her opportunity to make money and send it to the family. After four years she obtained the right to stay indefinitely in London and also a council flat in the upmarket area of Edgware Road in the centre of the city. She lived in a small studio with separate bathroom and kitchen, and minimal light, as it is located below ground level. In the main room she had a bed and a desk crammed with everything from kitchen supplies to a disconnected desktop computer. A friend who upgraded hers had given it to her, but it had been missing a cable to connect the screen to the CPU for several months. Although it was not currently working the computer remained in the centre of the room.

During the interview her TV was tuned to the BBC, but muted. It was inside a closet with the door open. "I like it because I feel like I have company", she said. She preferred news channels "because they have more images and sometimes they put words, so I can try to understand what they want to say". She also had a small cabinet next to her bed, on which was a radio and dozens of tapes of Peruvian singers and similar. Music, she said, transports her to Peru. Despite her age and the fact that she receives a pension, financially she needed to work and did so some afternoons in family houses. Therefore she had some free time that she spent at Casa Latina and

also with Peruvian friends from her church. At the centre her favorite activity was to look online for news and pictures from Trujillo, her hometown.

> *I like to go [to Casa Latina] because they have English classes, and sometimes there are teachers who let me in; others don't. From the computer classes I go to the English class because I would like to learn some words or something because otherwise I do not have anything... I go to the computer classes to learn how to use it because I used not to know any of that. [I would like to know about computers] to have more knowledge and to see my country, maps, addresses, everything about my country.* (Macarena, 65, Peruvian)

For Macarena, Casa Latina is a place to learn and to socialise. For her both language and the internet are seen as equally relevant, one to connect with the city where she has been living for 13 years, and the other to connect mainly with her home country. The internet symbolises technology to her. For example, the only advantage for her of knowing how to use a computer is that it is her access to the internet. This is true of other participants too, especially those without previous computer experience. However neither the internet nor computers were new to her. Macarena had seen, heard about, and used them in different spaces: first a long time ago while working as a cleaner, when she used to watch how her supervisor played on the computer and comment on it; then when having coffee with friends, when they used to talk to her about the advantages of being connected and also comment on their experiences of Skype and Facebook; finally, as a student in the beginners' class at the Latino community centre she dedicates time to understanding how to handle the device and the basic steps to go online. These experiences had given her a sense of the potentiality of being on the net, which is mainly optimistic:

> *[The internet] is very good for communication, also to see the family because you can see pictures, though I still have not learnt it. You can see everything, people say that there you can see everything you ask for, if you want to see an address it is there. ... New technologies are like fun, to not feel lonely, to hear music...* (Macarena, 65, Peruvian).

She had negotiated the meaning of the technology and has positive remarks about it. Furthermore, it is no surprise that, in this social context, aspects such as communication, tools for somehow becoming functional in the city (like finding an address by herself), or for continuing and expanding on previous hobbies are the main features that appeal to new users. Though she mainly uses it in a limited way and according to her skills, Macarena speaks with confidence about the properties of the technology. In her words, there is a mixture of experiences, things she is able to do by herself, and also things that she has heard could potentially be achieved.

> *I feel good when I do it [use of computers and internet] because I never had this before in my life, I didn't really know it. I bought from here computers for my children in Peru, and once when I went I tried to use it myself, they tried to teach me, but I did not learn. I did not learn because they told me too many things… [ICTs] are very handy because otherwise what would I do here confined on this room? (laughs)* (Macarena, 65, Peruvian)

Macarena intends not to let this opportunity to learn to use the internet slip away again. It is also a source for her to feel included. Nonetheless she is in the early stages of domestication, as she has negotiated its meaning but not yet incorporated its use into her daily life. Her domestication happens at the centre where she takes classes, but also in her home. This is because, although the computer does not function, she has kept it and 'installed' it in the centre of her room. This, in combination with her discourses, shows that she has passed the commodification phase and reached that of objectification. Nonetheless, it is unlikely that she will actually incorporate the technology, because in order to do so she will have to change her pattern of attendance at the centre or find the missing cable so that her home computer can be used.

Overall, it seems that domestication for these women started before their access to the internet. They were exposed for several years to images, messages and stories of others that led them to create their own idea of what the internet was and how it might be used by them, particularly given their current position. The collective meanings reached them even before the commodification stage started. The result was a clash between capabilities and expectations, or the intended place in their everyday lives and what they were actually able to do. It is a process with multiple back-and-forth, making it difficult to establish a clear trajectory. Internet domestication is thus part of a contradictory duality of objectification (their internet discourses, values) and incorporation (purpose, how it is used). The incorporation stage, that is when the object finally reaches a place in their everyday lives, it is not yet completed and it is unsure whether it would happen or not.

### *5.2.2 Redomestication, the experiences of savvy users*

Among vulnerable Latinas there are women who have had a better life in the past. These are usually women with higher level of education and therefore more opportunities to make use of technologies. Hence they had had opportunities to domesticate them in a friendly environment, with support and greater access in terms of quality and over time (e.g. workplaces, educational institutions, home). As previously discussed, once they migrated they made choices that led

them to a drastic change of living condition. Yet their knowledge and experience of using the web remained with them. What did not is the context where they used the internet. Then I wondered what happened to their domestication once almost all the elements of their environment have changed. In the current context of migration this question becomes relevant because it enables the exploration of a new and interesting situation which, so far, has been looked at within domestication literature from the point of view of other technologies, such as the use of telephones and computers prior to the advent of the internet (Haddon 2004; Haddon and Silverstone, 1996).

#### 5.2.2.1 The internet in a new context: Milena's testimony

Though redomestication has not been fully developed in the literature, it has been defined as a change in needs, routines and/or the persons involved (Lie & Sorensen, 1996). Therefore domestication is not a static process and the theory acknowledges that there is no closure: on the contrary, it is permeable to environmental changes. For example, empirical research has looked at how different life circumstances affect adoption and use of a variety of ICTs. Haddon (2004) conducted and reviewed studies referring to changes in the nature of work and family compositions, which bring new routines, demands and sometimes financial constrains that impact directly on the role of ICTs within the everyday. This is something that has been researched with household phones, and in the earlier phases of diffusion of computers, and therefore it is obviously not new or exclusive to migrants and their internet practices. Among Haddon's (2004) findings it is possible to see the importance of such devices in times of change, such as the phone which, while it 'enabled geographical relocation and new forms of social networking, it had at the same time become necessary condition for maintaining these networks and patterns of contact … enabling psychological support under difficult conditions' (Haddon 2004, p.119). The author reflects mainly on changes in work patterns (working from home, becoming unemployed, retirement) and household compositions and life courses (children being born, children leaving home, transition to single parenthood). The main contribution of this work is to emphasise how closely related are users' contexts and the role that technologies play in the everyday. Therefore it is necessary to go beyond skills and confidence of use as parameters to fully explain their construction of ICTs and to look at people's life circumstances, which lead to considering needs, interests, pressures, routines, and patterns of use, among other things. The social, cultural and financial aspects of someone's life are important matters to look at if the aim is to understand the role of devices in a user's everyday experience.

For educated migrant Latinas their new environment represents a major change in their lives. Though they also struggle with finances and language they face other kind of challenges, such as not being able to practise their professions and being forced to work in low skill occupations. This was the situation of Milena (35, Peruvian), a former television producer in Peru with a television studies and work experience in Miami. With a husband born in Italy, she had no problems with her visa to remain in the UK, but their decision to move to London had a high cost. Her husband, who had spent all his life in Argentina, was determined to go to Europe to open a restaurant. They knew from the beginning that it would not be easy for them or for their two children. They lived in a South London suburb, where she spent her time as cleaner and as a student in English classes, while he worked as an assistant in a restaurant. Their children attended the neighbourhood school. The major compromise they made was to exchange their flat in Buenos Aires for living, all four of them, in a room strewn with suitcases.

The interview was conducted in her house, more precisely in an unoccupied room containing a stained mattress, a plastic chair and an old-fashioned television. She described it as the kids' playroom; they were with the father in the next room where they actually live. That room is the same size, with two bunk beds and suitcases. There is almost no space on the floor. In the corner there is a television that is also a computer screen. This is connected to a CPU that they found on the street. That computer was for the children's use, because the couple did not want them to use their laptop. She didn't look comfortable with me observing her room and therefore didn't allow me to see how she or the children used the computer. She quickly invited me into the unused next-door room, where she offered me the only chair while she sat on the mattress.

It has been three years since Milena and her family arrived. At that time her kids were aged 2 and 4. Although the change had not been easy she was constantly smiling. She enjoyed talking about her years in television as a producer and how the internet changed her work. I was curious to know how she coped with the different life style, particularly with leaving a job in exchange for uncertainty and cleaning duties. Yet she didn't want to discuss it and insisted about their goals as professionals and as a family.

> *On the road I have encountered other people like me, for example my neighbour who works as cleaner, she also studied a Masters in Spain... this is a relief to me because I know that all of those who have studied like me also have goals, and they have to concentrate on those goals in order to achieve them, as I have to concentrate on mine. Just last Friday at work I met a girl who is currently pursuing an MSc at Southbank University. Well, everybody has to live like this.* (Milena, 35, Peruvian)

Milena is indeed a confident user with years of experience; she connects with her brother through Facebook, and chats with her mother on MSN on her new iPhone on a daily basis. Though she no longer needs to use applications such as PowerPoint or Word, they were of great use when she was working. Her experience of searching for information has changed from work-related to themes of life in London and translation. Since she has been living in the UK, the internet is synonymous with connection to the family, and the computer is a place for editing videos of her children to send abroad. Email and chat are the applications she is most interested in. As she is a confident user, she buys plane tickets, pays bills and applies for jobs for her husband online. These activities are unthinkable for participants newer to the technologies. Overall, her redomestication does not mean she started from scratch, but that she has re-accommodated the uses of the technology to these new needs. The meaning of the internet is slightly new, as it leaves aside work-related purposes to give space to new hobbies (such as online picture and video editing), to become the main channel for communication with her close family and some day-to-day chores in London. Physically, she has also rearranged devices and practices in accordance with these new meanings. For example the laptop is for her and the desktop computer for the children; the smartphone is to chat with her mother in Peru and to check her emails; the laptop is to pay bills, to buy things, to edit videos and to make job applications for her husband.

> *The phone is taking an important place because, for example, if I am in a waiting room I am curious to know what is happening, you know? Before I had to wait to get to the house and to have the time to check my emails, but now I am on the bus and I am checking them (laughs) or reading news or something. I like it very much because I am using my time!* (Milena, 35, Peruvian)

There is a multiple process of domestication, where new devices start to compete with old ones and at the same time new practices arise, such as that of being permanently connected and close to people who are physically distant. This is indeed confusing and is evidence of the complexity of domestication, and particularly of the internet, which cannot really be separated from the device from which it is accessed. When objects and context change, meanings would therefore change too. For Milena the desktop computer and the laptop have different roles; later, after the incorporation of the smartphone, meanings and practices were rearranged again. Despite the changes the internet has undergone in her life, it remained something trustworthy that provided her with a sort of reassurance in a more uncertain situation. Furthermore, the internet was a source of activities that she finds relaxing, which is far from the source of anxieties and insecurities it is for other participants:

> *There are many people that lost contact because they did not have access to this medium which remains unknown to them. However today you can maintain contact with people for years although you cannot actually be with them, but you can know how they are doing, or see how much their children have grown up; that is really good! ... It has made it bearable for me to live in another country… For me it is wonderful. I do not know what we would do if we were in a place without technology, I am so used to having a computer at home, and now a laptop, although when we found it in the garbage it was at a time when we did not have internet at home so I went to the library to be connected* (Milena, 35, Peruvian)

Due to Milena's domestication process the internet is a familiar tool that she uses with great confidence and in different aspects of her life. Redomestication took place mainly in the incorporation and conversion phases, due to a change in the strategies and purposes of use, as well as in the place where this happened. The symbolic meaning of the device also changed to one mainly of connection and communication. It helped in her day-to-day life, particularly as a way to achieve a particular dynamic of communication with her family, and also by providing a place to practise the activities that interested her. The latter is crucial in a disadvantaged environment.

#### 5.2.2.2 Continuity of practices and new meanings

Despite changes, there are practices that continue. Participants from this cohort perceived the internet also as a link to their past and a way to connect with old habits. These brings security - as one of them describes it, '*makes them feel safe'* - in surroundings that in a way are hostile. Vivian, for example, a former supermarket manager, had a hectic schedule that usually means that she is alone when at home. She said she didn't like it because she started thinking and longing to be with her young daughter. It is then that she would go online for company and *'to waste time, to stop thinking'*:

> *I like to play online, it is a way of de-stressing... I play all the time! It is horrible, but it is like forgetting everything, I forget about the world and the time passes so much quicker. (...) For me the computer is a relief in my life.* (Vivian, 32, Colombian).

In this situation the internet acquired meaning related to company and distraction, again far from previous job-related duties. Though obviously that was also possible before migration, it is in this context that it becomes much more relevant and predominant in her practices. This is

also the view of someone who does not need to negotiate its meaning from scratch. She re-accommodated it. It also works as a reminder of activities in their home countries, like visiting certain websites and social network sites. Like in Milena's case the internet continues as something meaningful in their lives, yet has been transformed and acquired these new colours. Consequently the place of this technology in their lives may appear peripheral (for leisure or communication), but it plays a role that cannot be completely replaced by other technologies and that overall brings them ontological security.

Participants' testimonies lead me to argue that domestication did not start from the beginning, yet when the context changed the place of technology changed too. The meanings associated with the device were linked to a sense of security and old habits. They are confident users who knew what could be done with it and they know how to handle it. New affordances in the light of their circumstances are of great advantage because the internet helped them in their immigrant experience. They could continue with usual practices, and though the work/education needs were no longer relevant they could use their knowledge in other more specific contextual ways. The variety of situations and the dynamics of the everyday challenged the domestication, an example of how this very neat theory needs to return to some of its forgotten or less developed concepts. Redomestication grasps changes of needs, of interests. Then when there is a change in the conditions, in the routines, and in the needs, a change that is as brutal as migration, it is only fair to ask how technologies still make sense.

## 5.3 Latinas' articulations of the internet

For the internet to acquire meanings in people's everyday lives there are several other aspects beyond context of appropriation that need to be carefully assessed. Double and triple articulations are concepts that guide this process. The first addresses the device as the carrier of messages that link the public with the private and their mutual negotiations. Therefore there are two levels of meanings, the internet as a device and as a medium. The double articulation tackles the messages they deal with, reflecting on greater detail on the "outside'" of the household. On the other hand, triple articulation refers to how they engage with it beyond technical skills, in terms of intentions, company, the atmosphere of their connections, among others. Nonetheless I cannot dismiss the methodological and analytical challenges involved in deconstructing both articulations. Then it would be presented as a theoretical exercise, which relies heavily on the specificity of the user. This is why, although patterns can be drawn, I will approach from the perspective of one of the women that took part on the study. I will present

her case in greater detail and use her technological experiences, practices and understandings to enable me to exemplify the articulations.

### *5.3.1 Valeria and her nights of CineTube*

Valeria used to be a Colombian businesswoman, joint owner with her husband of a bakery shop in Bogotá. After 11 years of marriage she left the country, heartbroken, after discovering an affair. She went to Spain alone, leaving her two children with their father. In Madrid she rebuilt her life in similar conditions, a 'fantastic life' she described, and brought her oldest to live with her. She lived in a two-bedroom flat, had good friends and overall a good quality of life. All of that disappeared once the economic crisis hit the country and she lost her job. After a year of unemployment they moved to London as she was told jobs were easy to find there. However, becoming a cleaner and kitchen assistant was not easy. Neither was moving to a single rented room or sharing it with her 20 year old son, who did not speak English and was enrolled for the first time in cleaning duties too.

Though Valeria encountered computers during elementary education, limited knowledge was gained. Yet it was a first step towards losing fear and gaining confidence. She had this again later in her life, when the moral economy of her household included a PC, and meanings and practices were mainly work related for her. The internet was not yet available, so she domesticated it as a technological device to organise her business rather than a medium as such. Consequently the double articulations of messages from the outside in dialogue with those from the household did not really occur in that situation either. Nonetheless it is important to stress her relationship with the device because, as discussed, for those who had not previously domesticated a computer the internet was considered a much more complex task[39]. So because a computer (with no internet) was in Valeria's household and business background prior to her migration, she had had the opportunity to become familiar with its use and this made it easier to transfer her experiences and digital skills to internet domestication.

> *I cling to the internet because of my personality and because of the routine, and because if I was not in this situation the internet would not be my number one. For example, if I want to move house the first thing I need to check is if they have internet ... We have Wi-Fi at home and we use the internet every day (laughs). ... I have my own laptop and my*

[39] This is something that we need to keep in mind because the internet is a technology to which access is far more intricate than for other devices that share the device/media duality, such as a television. Though all of them involve in practice the task of domesticating the material aspect, the internet presents a different kind of challenge given its media richness and level of interactivity, forcing users to handle a much more complex device.

> *son has one too... when we first arrived we just had mine, but he used to ask for it every ten minutes and I had to lend it to him, but now he has his own so it is easier, and I took advantage of the situation and bought a new one for me (laughs)* (Valeria, 40, Colombian)

As she stated, it was in a migration context that the internet took on a more prominent role in her routine. It was a bridge for communication and a source of entertainment. Its importance was reflected in her needs and those of her son, which made them to invest in two devices so they did not have to share. On the other hand the internet was her main means of connection with family and friends back at Colombia and Spain, where they remain.

> *We are six siblings and my parents are alive, so we see every other weekend on Skype. We also use Messenger and Facebook, sometimes I chat with my siblings too, and if my sister is in the house she tells the girls to connect to Skype to talk to them too. With my daughter we also chat every day* (Valeria, 40, Colombian)

The internet is a window to the life in Colombia and Spain. She reported that she needed the union with her family and friends, to see them, to connect with them in the most interactive way possible, which is why she accesses a diversity of communication applications. Hers is not a generic web, but one she constructed for herself as a channel of communication and a connection with her Latino roots, such as music and online cuisine. The double articulation is then formed mainly by its communications properties. The messages she was exposed to were related to the intimacy of her family and their daily lives. There is a reunion in front of the screen where they could chat as if they were in the living room all together. She then replicated online some of these rituals "to be with" them. She also used a multitude of platforms to connect using simultaneously Messenger, Skype, email and Facebook. Her routine was to have at least two of these open at the same time, so she multitasks and jumps from one to another taking advantage of voice, image and written words. Regarding entertainment, she stopped her links to Colombia and Spain and started to relate to a variety of content, such as movies. This was habitual with her son every night after dinner, where both decided what to watch.

> *What I like is to watch movies on CineTube, though sometimes they stop working which is frustrating! …. Last night we watched one about Hitler, but I like to do it with my son, in this way we share something. And the room is so small that to eat there is depressing, there's not even a table to eat dinner together, so with the movies on the laptop it is easier. Most of the time I fall asleep, but I don't care, it is so sweet of him to ask me which movie we are watching tonight* (Valeria, 40, Colombian)

The internet had different levels of meanings for her and became an important part of her experience. The most relevant ones were related to connecting with family and friends. In the first case it was connecting with those far away, in the second, connecting with her son. In this case the movie was of secondary importance, compared with doing something together. The value and symbolic context came from sharing the activity, a meeting point despite having two devices. It was also a distraction from her day-to-day life and, as others previously stated, a way to escape from particularly stressful situations and to have some entertainment at hand in their own language. From Valeria's account, it was hard on her to have such limited space in the room, to share a bathroom with strangers and not to provide better accommodation for her son, among other things. The internet enabled her to 'escape' from that briefly and to focus her mind on other things. For example, she used her free time to surf about popular culture and figures such as those of British society. She was a great fan of the late princess Diana and enjoyed reading online about her life. This became her main point of connection with the city, as she did not engage with other aspects of it. Despite her internet skills and availability of connection she remained mostly out of contact with the day-to-day life of the society around her, affecting the kind of messages she negotiated. This selection of messages was according to both interests and possibilities. Still this wasn't only a matter of choice. For example, free newspapers were available daily yet she was not interested and also unable to understand them. It was precisely in these particularities that the symbolic context and value of the internet took life.

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I aimed to empirically approach the key concepts of domestication in a migration context. Ethnography and the questions guided by the theory enabled me to organise them in accordance with the three main pillars: the moral economy, the stages of domestication, and the articulations. From their moral economy I could grasp their interactions, values and beliefs. The community centre represented a safe space where they could openly discuss topics of interest to them, mainly related to their Latino roots. The internet took a back seat while they enjoyed socialising among peers, focusing on ethnic-related conversations and discussing aspects such as culture and social experience. At home it was possible to perceive that this Latino atmosphere continued. However, in Elenas' house the circle was much more restricted and family members were the priority of their connections and interactions. It was also easier to notice from the nature of their communications and consumptions how marginalised they were from British society, in contrast with how much they consumed media from Latino and Spanish speaking countries, and concentrated their socialisation on friends and family from back home.

When analysing domestication stages I could observe how participants had different technological points of departure. This was because of their backgrounds prior to migration. It was there that access to a variety of resources, particularly educational, led some of them to domesticate the internet in a study or work context. Later in migration they went through a process of redomesticating it. In other words, change of circumstances and new needs forced them to find a new place for technologies, yet the meanings were not negotiated from scratch. It was also a source of ontological security due to the endurance of practices and rituals in a strange environment. In contrast other participants only had access to collective meanings, which motivated the incorporation of the internet into their everyday lives once in London. It was there that access was provided and they were keen to take the opportunity as a means of improving their quality of life and experience abroad. One of the drawbacks was that instead of helping them to join the mainstream, it increased their marginalisation due to the nature of the messages from the public domain that they negotiated. Still it was their sense of digital inclusion when using them that promoted their practices.

The articulations of internet as the message they negotiate and the symbolic environment of their consumptions were also coloured by their Latino roots in the nature both of the media content and of their communications. Yet it provided an idea of how restricted the messages they negotiated were. This was perhaps clearer when looking at Casa Latina and how the familiar Latino environment encouraged them to discuss their countries and traditions, cooking, meanings of words, which were materialised through the use of the internet (e.g.: to look for pictures from their hometown and show and explain them to the rest of the class). Their practices and how they are performed are constrained by a need for connection with their ties and with the people they are close to. This may be a response to the challenges of their situation, particularly their isolation and living conditions.

Finally through multiple contributions of this analysis it was at times difficult to present the topics in a clear-cut way. This overlap only became visible after I tackled the concepts empirically. For example, I mostly relied on descriptions such as accounts of spatial arrangements, interactions and online routines. It was also easier to perceive when addressing Latinas' topics of discussion that were based on selected messages. The richness of the descriptions touched simultaneously on concepts such as moral economy and double articulation. Though my aim was to analyse these from the different angles, repetition was needed to provide the big picture where these concepts were situated. This leads me to wonder if it is possible to evaluate domestication on the basis of these three key components, or if

perhaps it is just one process, so narrow and descriptive, that there must inevitably be a superimposition.

Another difficulty encountered was that the theory is extremely valuable in considering context, but does not address changes in it. On the contrary, the perspective on context is uniform and without contradictions or particularities. This is where domestication needs the help of other approaches in order to give an account of the dissonance between home and moral economy, or between household and public messages. Indeed when migrants are the focus of the analysis socio-cultural settings and their presence in the process should be acknowledged. In domestication, the public domain provides the core of the elements from outside helping to negotiate messages and devices, and the ways in which these are perceived. These interactions with the outside are mainly performed through the messages provided by the media and through conversations. For example, being in the position of a foreigner, with a certain level of social isolation due to language and cultural differences was a rich source for discussing the messages they chose to negotiate. Furthermore, domestication is tied to the household as a solid unit, taking no account of the fact that the households of the women studied here are not entirely located in London. They are 'in between' places and cultures, transnational women with ties in two places and sometimes with a tendency to be digitally located in their home country. Therefore these times of mobility might herald a new chapter for domestication theory. To untangle this complicated knot of positionings, cultures and interactions, there are elements from transnational and immigration theory that may be of help, such as their Latino codes and links. These are at the core of the next chapter.

# CHAPTER VI

# Cultural interpretations and affordances of the internet in a transnational context

One of the unexpected situations encountered in fieldwork was that women in the study had very different technological expertise, and therefore different levels of confidence and breadth of use. Yet despite these inequalities, there was a pattern that led to similar media choices and types of communications once in a foreign country. The previous chapter laid out how some of these choices were made because of their current positions of marginalisation. Here I aim to further those from a sociocultural perspective, touching on aspects born of their transnational, migrant conditions and cultural roots. Next the questions that frame this chapter are related to how the context of Latina migrant can help to explain this technology in their everyday lives, and furthermore, how cultural understandings enable affordances in this particular situation to be perceived.

The chapter is in three main sections. The first deals with participants' communication practices and how they focus their efforts on recreating various forms of communication through the internet. This also shows how important it was for them to maintain close relations with family members. Then I turn to the messages they negotiate as a result of their cultural consumption choices, which were very much delimited by their interests, their capacity to understand English and their Latino ties. The messages they negotiate are linked to how strongly attached they were to their countries of origin, digitally positioning their houses in a more familiar society. Lastly, I explore how they also valued the internet as a source of knowledge and a learning device. Consequently, gaining independence and feelings of empowerment and inclusion were among the implications of their activities.

## 6.1 Familial and familiar communication

The internet was above all a choice, these women's choice. Nonetheless, it has its boundaries and did not necessarily mean that other practices, such writing letters or making phone calls, stopped. Although it was perceived as an improvement in terms of the possibilities it offers, it came to complement rather than to eliminate all their previous communication practices. For some of the women studied, it was part of a slow process in combination with habits with which they feel more comfortable and which were in harmony with those of members of their social networks, such as mothers, siblings, children, close friends. Thus these women's construction of

the internet differed, and there were aspects of their domestication practices and meanings that could be perceived as contradictory. It is necessary, then, to unpack these in order to look at the affordances they perceived in technology.

To keep in touch with family and friends in another country was something recurrent in informal conversations, interviews, and in the computer classes. This was perhaps one of the most striking patterns across all participants and a dominant element in conversations. They spoke of the internet as a communication channel that fitted their needs, and how much advantage they could take of it. They chatted about how to use video calls, shared problems attaching pictures to emails, or uploading them to Facebook, among other things. Overall, they valued highly images and voices that made them feel closer. To "keep in touch" was mandatory, and also a representation of their struggle to maintain closeness despite distance. They expressed a great deal of responsibility for keeping communication channels open and to provide the possibility for the others too - for example, by providing computers, or paying for internet contracts or even classes. To maintain contact was very important because any failure could be misinterpreted, no matter how harsh their circumstances.

### *6.1.1 Long live technology: Mónica's testimony*

Mónica (67, Colombian) has been a migrant more than half of her life. She left her home town because her daughter had been selected for a graduate programme but was unemployed and unable to pay for it. A cousin helped her find work as a carer for an elderly woman in Venezuela. Then she was again unemployed and through another relative contacted someone in Italy, where she worked on a farm. 15 years later she left to Spain to be with Daniela, her youngest daughter, who had recently had a baby. Daniela convinced her that London was a better place to live and, again with the help of a relative, she moved. All these years far way from home and family, for Mónica to be in contact was one of her "duties", and much more difficult when new technologies where not available:

> *In Italy I didn't know how to dial a phone, so I used to write letters, but these took ages to arrive because they were sent by ship, like when I was little. It was a terrible thing of the Third World! When I left Colombia to go to Venezuela, the letters to my mum and my daughter took a month to arrive, but when I was living in Italy I realised like a year later, when I received all the letters back, that no-one had received anything from me. Everyone in my family, and also close friends, were so offended: how dare I leave and not write to them!* (Mónica, 67, Colombian)

For Mónica's family and relatives, delayed or lost mail was no excuse. Hence took it her some work to restore these connections. This was also why she was keen to use the internet to ease the flow of communication between them. Her main motivation for starting computer classes was that she wanted to contact her sister and one of her daughters via emails and video-calls. Yet she had no opportunity to learn how to use them until she was in London:

> *I knew of the existence of all this, of course. My sister and I always talked about how wonderful it would be if we could have a computer and communicate when someone leaves or moves countries. We did not know how we could manage to buy one and then, if we could buy a computer, how were we going to use it if we did not know how it worked! Then when I heard about this [computer] course [in Casa Latina] I felt so happy! Can you imagine? I have a daughter in Spain. The day I sent her the first email she was very happy too and she –who later bought me a Blackberry- answered me by saying "Welcome to the XXI century, long live technology!" [laughs]* (Mónica, 67, Colombian).

As Mónica said, one of her daughters bought her a Blackberry, which she used not only to make long distance calls (with a phone card), but also to check her emails. For her and for her family it was a priority to expand on their ways to communicate. From her testimony there were two aspects to it. One was the difficulty of communication, such as her problems with letters. The other, perhaps less obvious, is related to painful memories of loneliness, particularly in Italy. There she was alone and, as in England, she had not managed the language. Moreover the nature of her job forced her to spend long hours indoors.

> *I thought I would become crazy, I needed to talk to someone, to vent. I was taking care of a sick women and I didn't care how much I would have to pay to use her [landline] phone … I was so lonely, I couldn't go to the street to talk to people, I was so lonely* (Mónica, 67, Colombian).

In her London experience she was not as desperate as in Italy. The company of her daughter and her grandson made her life completely different. Nonetheless, communication, especially long distance, had long been an issue. The course and the gift of the smartphone were major steps for her because she started using computers, internet and mobile internet all at once. This was a great challenge that she took very enthusiastically, in small steps. For example on the course she learnt how to open an email account, and also how to send and receive emails with attachments. She practised with her Blackberry at home, where Daniela helped her. She described not feeling confident and still had problems accessing mail, yet she carried it with her all the time. I was

impressed when she showed me her customised home screen picture. There she appeared with the flowers she was given on Mothers' Day. She also used social networks. Daniela set up the profile but she managed to log in through the phone. Her main interest was pictures shared by her contacts. All this, as Mónica acknowledged, was a major turn in her life as a migrant:

> *I am happy, happy, because it is a way of communicating that is cheaper. I used to spend so much money on telephone calls, on phone cards, cards that steal your minutes, cards that don't work, cards where I had mistakenly erased a number and lost them without spend a penny of it - I have experienced everything with cards! And now I am so, so happy ... Now we are just starting to learn about email, but that is what I wanted the most, to send pictures and to see things through the camera* (Mónica, 67, Colombian).

She also gained a sense of independence and empowerment. To be self-sufficient and to communicate with others was a major step, particularly for those who were encountering this kind of technology for the first time. Nonetheless caution is needed because appropriating the internet and these new forms of communicating doesn't necessarily mean that they will erase previous ways of communication. For example, writing letters was still important for some of them, particularly for those with elderly mothers, as this is an intimate way of communication accessible to the mothers. Like Antonia, she is a regular email user but she prefers to write to her mother every month. She does not expect her mother to write back because "to spend a dollar there is difficult". However this is something she has been doing since she left Ecuador several years ago and that she pointed out as a more personal, closer contact.

### *6.1.2 Images over words*

One of the advantages of the internet is its variety of platforms that enable different levels of interaction and a variety of communication channels, including something of particular interest to my participants: pictures. Thus they tried to make the most of this luxury with images. Elisa (28, Venezuelan) also regularly writes to her mother and sends the letters by mail. She occasionally sends printed pictures too. For her it was important that her mother was able to see how her granddaughter had grown, and she said she would like her family to have a webcam so they would 'see each other':

> *...next time I go [to Venezuela] I want to give a computer to my sister, with a webcam, because she does not have one. In that way we can see each other more often. Also to*

*speak to my mum, to be able to see her and to talk to her and to my sisters and brothers ... I want to do that so we can communicate more often*. (Elisa, 28, Venezuelan)

To be able to see, to talk and to communicate beyond written words was very valuable for the women in the study. They had language and status barriers so were unlikely to have many (close) British friends or even interactions with people of similar status. It is also worth reflecting on how they needed their family to be similarly enabled technologically to increase the channels and richness of their communication, as Elisa planned for her future trip to visit her family. For them, providing the basic infrastructure was part of the task. This would facilitate or even enable communication due the "accessibility" they provide for proxy users, such as the elderly. Video-calls did not require them to read or type, and could be set up by someone else in the family once the connection was in place, so were much easier. This is also a reason why among those starting domestication video-calls were more popular and widespread than email, which present greater challenges. Video-calls were also perceived as a more social activity involving more people.

#### 6.1.2.1 Francisca and her fond memories of Messenger

The strong sense of family and ties were among the most usual reasons for these women to become internet users. Still due to their context, access and use should not be taken for granted. Many of them needed to deal with a series of other issues first, such as in Francisca's (41, Colombian) story. She left her grown up children in Madrid to take care of her husband in London. She maintained contact with the help of the internet (accessed from a neighbour's computer) and also daily phone calls. However, the story of how she started to use this technology goes a long way back, to when she arrived alone in Spain ten years previously. She left Colombia some years after her life as a happy housewife with four young children had taken a major turn when her first husband was mugged and then murdered. She struggled for the following six years to support her family. She sold lottery tickets in the streets, worked as a needlewoman, washed dishes and peeled potatoes in restaurants. Then a former boyfriend reappeared and promised a better future for her and the children in Spain. The plan was first to marry and settle there, and later to bring the children. Though things evolved accordingly, she recalled that she never expected to spend such bitter days apart from the children. In this context the internet became her main means of remaining in contact. Yet the first obstacle was to actually use it:

*I had not finished school and never in my life used computers, or cameras or anything! I looked at this thing and it seemed so complicated. I was going alone to the cyber-cafe... and went there because I wanted to see my children and the desire to be able to see them and to talk to them was what encouraged me to learn. A person who attended helped me, but he told me he didn't have the time to teach me, so every now and then he came to me and told me "click here, click there". He opened a Messenger account for me, an email account, and I had to learn very quickly ... It was embarrassing because all time I needed to bother him "excuse me, would you please explain this? I don't know how to do that, I cannot see the camera".* (Francisca, 41, Colombian)

To see and talk to her children was the motivation for Francisca to domesticate the computer and to learn from scratch with little support. In participants who have faced vulnerabilities prior migration it was usual that once they moved to a developed country they had the opportunity to encounter, and to domesticate, both computers and the internet. Communication with family was usually a major trigger. Then the efforts of these women would be focused on those they loved, family members and friends. They were keen to be available online solely for them and not as a means of knowing other people or expanding their limited social network. On the contrary, starting friendships on the net was something that most of them expressed fear of, since they had been alerted by press reports to people being deceived or even killed after meeting an online acquaintance in person. This is a darker idea of technology, which somehow they did not relate to their conception of the internet as a safe place to 'be' with their family. In addition, from their reported experiences, as well as observations, it was possible to understand how the Latino community in London does not share online bonds or communicate through online networks. For my participants, their understanding of internet communication was mainly bounded by family and close friends who were far away, and their desire to be close pushed even those who were afraid of the devices, or who did not have the skills, to make an effort to overcome this and to make contact with those back home. Nonetheless they reported great satisfaction and the feeling that their efforts paid off. For Francisca this was even more special, particularly after the tragic passing of her oldest child on the Madrid railway.

*When I first started to use it [internet in a cyber-café] the worst was that I could only go every 15 days on my days off ... but imagine... not long ago, before leaving Madrid, I found CDs with recordings of that time and we watched them together with the kids. It was so amazing I recorded them! And I completely forgot about it…. I could see them all four; they were so little, and they laughed about my hair. It was very emotional, particularly because there was my older son who passed away. It was so amazing, and*

*looks at me now! I know how to use Messenger, Facebook, YouTube, to go into Google.* (Francisca, 41, Colombian)

Those who left their immediate family behind appreciated this kind of practice much more. Isolation and distance are part of their daily lives and therefore ties and the support of their families become vital. Some of them cope by trying to become more involved in a religious community or a community class, but the majority look to the computer and to the telephone for comfort and encouragement. In this context the internet is the cheapest and at the same time the richest way to keep connected. Hence chatting, writing, seeing each other via web cameras and sending pictures are the main activities they undertake, or at least try to, as Elisa shares:

*With the internet we can see and also look for other people, such as relatives from whom you don't receive much news... and the internet is important because of this, because you can communicate, you can call your family, they can see you even though you are so far away. Everything is so much easier and faster with the internet... for me it is easier to talk through the phone and that kind of stuff, but the internet is really important.* (Elisa, 28, Venezuelan)

Elisa touches on the fact that the internet is not a 'natural' or 'easy' choice, as it comes with some difficulties. Yet the gains of keeping in touch with lost relatives or seeing others despite distance make it worthwhile for many of them. However, participants share a diversity of stories and aims where the internet played a variety of roles. What transcended their differing technological approaches was their desire to be close to relatives and how they agreed the internet was an opportunity to extend their means of communication. As I have presented, to be close to them digitally is sometimes a source of stress (e.g.: learning how to handle the device) and of relief (e.g.: communication involving images, quick access to pictures). Developing from the concept of *polymedia*, they evaluated different channels of communication according to the relationships. For example, emails were reserved for friends and acquaintances, also for those with more technological expertise. In contrast, when direct family was involved they expressed a need to actually see the other person. In Francisca's words:

*On the Internet you can see your family who are in your country, you can see them on a screen, you can talk to them. You would not be able to touch them, but you can see them, you can see them talk and laugh.* (Francisca, 41, Colombian)

As Francisca said, to be able to see and talk to someone on the web are affordances that were born in a context of marginalisation and social and emotional isolation. Their internet is mainly

constructed as a communication device. Then many of other possibilities offered by, for example, a computer become lost in the background. This is a new door for those who were both computer- and internet-illiterate. It is also a change for those who used to work with the internet, since changed occupations translated into different needs. Overall their tendency to value close family and to be as 'near' to them as possible was one reason why they shaped technology in this particular way. The richness of these platforms that enhance interaction are in accordance with their need, triggering their online practices.

## 6.2 Media consumption and choices

As stated, due the nature of their lives and contexts, their media choices were rather limited. Yet from observations and interviews, what stuck out was how they were mainly linked to their cultural heritage. Without wishing to generalise, there was a pattern of preference for Latino soap operas, programmes in Spanish, and media from their home country that I cannot ignore. From the elements provided by the data there are three premises that help to make sense of this situation: (a) it was more practical, as they could understand the language; (b) they shared an attachment, in other words they understood the cultural codes and there was a certain familiarity to the kind of content; and (c) it helped them to remain connected through a continuity of practices, and to have access to messages similar to those that were negotiated back in their home countries, offering a source of identification.

### *6.2.1 "Me no entiende": language and consumption alternatives*

Media consumption was, as with many other aspects of internet practices, not black and white but rife with contradictions. In this context language was understandably the first obstacle to consuming mainstream media. As discussed so far, many of them have repeatedly come back to the idea that television was not particularly useful because they did not understand much of it. This inevitably made British mainstream media less attractive. Yet it did not mean that they were completely unaware of or uninterested in what was happening around London. On the contrary, there were expressions of concern and also curiosity. For example Antonia liked to watch a Spanish news channel particularly because sometimes they gave news from London and she could understand the entire report. Likewise, Andrea regularly took a copy of The Sun newspaper that was left in the waste bin of one of the offices she cleans. She said she likes looking at the pictures and trying to guess the content of the news. Or in Vivian's flat, the dinner table was packed with Metros, the free newspaper available in the underground. Therefore these women were not completely alienated or isolated in their homes. They went to work, they used public transport and they had access to media outlets and messages derived from these. They could, of course, tune out voluntarily, but only to a certain degree.

Children, usually more proficient than their mothers, were a powerful reason to have a television set in the house, as in the house of Mónica, Daniela and Guillermo (7 years). They live on the first story of a house divided into two flats. The walls of their two bedrooms were full of multi-coloured educational children's posters showing the alphabet, numbers in English, and fruits and vegetables with a series of basic words. 'In that way we all learn with Guillermo' said Daniela while watching "CBeebies", a BBC children's network programme. They decided to have that channel and another children's channel as constant company on their television to learn some words and to benefit from its educational aspect. Amalia (38, Bolivian) also got a TV set because of her daughter, yet she preferred to use it as a platform for watching movies on DVD:

> *[When I want to distract myself] I put on a Spanish CD because the TV programmes I don't understand them… although they always recommend that you put the news on because if you watch it you can learn English better, but I get very nervous watching something that I don't understand.* (Amalia, 38, Bolivian)

Amalia's account picks up on some of the socialised 'truths' among participants, such as that because they were living in an English spoken city they would learn more easily; or if they watch media in that language they would "get used to it and therefore learn quickly. Patricia (63, Colombian) also experimented with using English subtitles, but also reported a high level of frustration and stopped the practice. Macarena, on the other hand, used to have the BBC on the television because she liked the images and they gave her a feeling of company, yet she regularly had it on mute. Overall, though there were programmes that they knew about, such as the popular talent show The X Factor, they failed to consistently engage in active viewing. It was in this situation that the satellite television and internet as access to television programmes predominated.

#### 6.2.1.1 Cindy and her little helper

Brixton, in south London, is a place well known for its predominantly multi-ethnic community, especially British African-Caribbean. Here Cindy (39, Bolivian) found a room for herself and her two children, Dani (5) and Luiyi (14). They lived in a council flat of 45 square metres with another family: a women and her adult son. The five of them manage with two double beds, one in what used to be a living room, the other in Cindy's room. Despite the minimal space in the flat there were two desktop computers, both flat screens, one bought by Cindy while living in Spain at the beginning of 2010, the other belonging to her flatmates. Both rooms appeared to be arranged around the computers, each of them with a huge comfortable chair, taking almost all

the available space. When I entered her room she apologised for the mess, and also advised me that her landlady did not allow her to have guests. “If she appears you just have to go away quickly, I will take care of her,” she warned.

Cindy’s Spanish documentation allowed her to come to the UK and she contacted a friend who had a cleaning job waiting for her. She moved with a couple of suitcases and her most treasured possession, the computer. The kids usually used it without a connection, mostly to play videogames. Cindy used it to listen to music. Nonetheless that afternoon, as on many others, she had a plan. She ordered Luiyi to move the desktop PC to her landlady’s room and use the internet cable there, even though she did not like Cindy to use the internet connection.

> *My computer is in Spanish so I understand it much better … I can open the chat, that is the only thing I can do without asking him [her son] if the computer is in English* (Cindy, 39, Bolivian).

Language was again present in the conversation. Cindy did not understand a word of English and her older son is her translator in the bank and at unavoidable appointments. To complete legal documentation she sometimes seeks help at Irmo. In this context the computer being in Spanish made a major difference to her experience. Otherwise she would need her older son next to her, as she does when she has to connect from the cybercafé two blocks away from her flat.

Cindy started to use computers and the internet while in a telemarketing job in Spain. There she had some free time that allowed her colleagues to teach her how to create an account in Hi5, the social network everyone was talking about. She started to spend more time online than working, and despite her boss complaining she still found time to open a Hotmail account and to chat on MSN. It was then she recalled losing fear of computers and learning everything she now knows. In the last couple of years she opened a Facebook account too. To chat was her favourite activity and also the reason why she spent around £10 per week in the cybercafé. As well as online chat, one of her favourite activities was to look for videos of her hometown, Puerto Suarez, on YouTube. The results usually include a couple of touristic and promotional videos because of its lake:

> *I like to look for videos about it [hometown], I can see the squares where I played in my childhood, I recognise the houses, the streets, and it is wonderful … [picking up her younger son and place him on her knees] see that? Mummy is from there ... I miss it so much, but when I come back I want to build a house. A big house, there! In that street*

> *[pointing at the video] It is an expensive street, there are just hotels in the other side. I cannot go there now, I don't have the money for the ticket and we are not ready yet, but one day, one day … I don't care I don't understand a thing [of the video in English] but I can recognise the places, I know this video and other eight more by memory, I have watch them every time I can… and every time I cry* (Cindy, 39, Bolivian).

In Cindy's account there are several aspects that link her online experience with a deep connection with her roots. She chose a video that was comforting because it enabled her to recognise her childhood and where she came from. It also evoked future plans and dreams of a house there. Furthermore she involved her children so they would also be linked to it, or at least familiarised with this distant place. She selected the pieces of technology that helped them to build a bridge, to emotionally connect from a standpoint other than a communication stream (such as when she chats with her mother). These kinds of practices which she found comforting were widespread among the women in the study. For example 'El Cartel TV' - an online aggregator of TV shows, soap operas and similar from Colombia - was a popular choice. It facilitated access to familiar broadcasting while keeping them up to date with the programmes.

### *6.2.2 Internet, the almighty platform*

The internet was valued as a rich and diverse medium that became quite a priority in some of these women's households. Its flexibility - mimicking other media or as a platform for a variety of forms of communication - made it highly desirable. However, in their circumstances it remained difficult for them to express it as a 'real need'. As Francisca pointed out:

> *[In London] we don't have a computer. In Madrid we have a computer and internet, but here he [husband] says we don't need it because we are old, that there the children need it. However I say no sir, we both need it, and he asks, to do what? Well, to communicate, to watch television, to watch movies, to learn English.* (Francisca, 41 Colombia)

Francisca's account was brief yet it touched on many layers of how the web can be perceived. For example the internet fulfilled her entertainment desires, particularly to watch shows and movies she could understand in both language and content. She also values it as a means of education ('to learn English') and as a distraction from a everyday stress. She has also previously mentioned the emotional connection attached to it, like keeping in touch and seeing her children back in Spain. Yet the reasons she gave to her husband for buying a computer and getting a connection show the complex tangle of ideas and expectations that are associated with

this technology. The internet, therefore, cannot be simplified as being for communications, or for learning, or for mainstream media consumption. Although there were some exceptions, the internet was perceived as a mixture of all three, depending of the position of the user.

#### 6.2.2.1 "To Love in Turbulent Times"

Every night when Antonia arrived home from work, she knew there was a new episode of *Amar en Tiempos Revueltos* (*To Love in Turbulent Times)* waiting for her. This Ecuadorian soap opera was her only entertainment after a busy day and she watched it every night while having dinner. She used to watch it with her husband, but now he gets home earlier than her and says he cannot wait for her. When telling me about her passion for the series and how she made it part of her daily routine, it seemed as if she was talking about a common Ecuadorian show. And she was, but with the difference that we are not in Ecuador and that she is not watching it on television. She was watching it from YouTube, relying on someone who faithfully uploads the updated episode every day. Still for Antonia, watching the soap opera doesn't qualify as time on the computer or on the internet because she was "watching TV".

Watch television and radio programmes via the web, or looking for videos or music, was common practice among participants. It was also common not to consider this to be using a computer or the internet, but consuming the original media. In other words, they would say that they 'watched soap operas' or 'listened to the radio' whichever platform they were using. The main vehicle, the internet, 'disappeared' for them. One way to interpret this is that their involvement with the genre is part of a certain practice and when they continue it in a migration context how they do so is immaterial. For example, Antonia was in another country with a very different everyday life, but her soap opera remained the same, and in her eyes it was not as if she was actually using the computer or the internet – she is simply watching television as she used to.

Online platforms and applications can indeed help migrants. Watching shared video content feels like watching programmes on a television set. This is one of the reasons why YouTube was one of these women's best friends. It allowed them not only to disconnect from one reality, but most importantly to connect with a distant one, giving them a sense of familiarity, something they could cling onto in an adverse and uncertain situation. To some extent it enabled them to "travel" back to their home country. To recall Victoria's words, when watching her favourite shows she felt "transported to Colombia", like watching it in her living room. Though this practice might initially have been due lack of English, it appeared to go beyond an entertainment practice. It was their way to remain connected and to practise something that

rewarded them with ontological security. Thus it encompassed more than simply watching the soap opera. They were continuing to do things they would be doing if they were at home. Furthermore, they connected to others in their home country by watching the same programmes, such as news reports. The extent varied between participants, but potentially they could be part of conversations and discussions that were going on at home despite being in London.

Overall these accounts and observations reflect how the messages and meanings negotiated are from a mixture of British and Latino sources, positioning the households sometimes between the two, or usually tending more towards Latino (as perceived from their moral economy). Then, if the media are the main entry point to articulating the public messages and the public arena in these households, it is relevant to ask what kind of messages they were negotiating and how this affected their immigration experience. It is possible to argue that with these practices they were strengthening their transnational ties and at the same time lessening their chances of engaging with the society where they were currently living. Was this because of their cultural roots? Was it because their English was inadequate? I will argue that it is because of both. From their accounts it can be seen that they shared aspects of their *Latin-ness*: characteristics such as their fondness for drama and soap operas, as well as other media content from the region. They described feelings of identification with the stories told, as well as the stereotypes depicted. They also mentioned habits like watching specific news reports and at the same time talked about their own countries. Interestingly this was more often by watching news reports than reading online newspapers. Overall they were receiving and negotiating similar messages but at a distance.

Language is perhaps a more specific way of seeing this mismatch. Words also contain cultural codes and therefore Spanish television was preferred due to the shared language and cultural understandings. Though more could be said about their choices of genres and consumption practices than can be addressed in these pages, it is clear that these choices are linked to the affordances perceived in the media. In other words, among these women and in these circumstances, the internet functioned as a television set. It could be argued, then, that for them the internet is a connection not to an intangible net but more concretely to their home countries. Through it they can communicate with people at home and also watch, listen to and read the same content as those people. By doing so they were not only participating in that community but also reinforcing old habits in a new setting.

The internet can take this multiplicity of forms, and hence is particularly difficult to grasp. Its flexibility, interactivity and countless platforms invite users to take from it whatever makes

sense for them. The challenge of following how these women use it is very obvious here, because of both the multiplicity of forms that it can take and also the many points that it touches their lives. Yet in the complexity behind their choices of media consumption and practices the Latino element cannot be ignored. Although not all their communication and consumption were related to their homeland, an important portion of it was, spanning discourses, practices and experiences. Though located in London, they could be said at time to be digitally relocated in their home countries.

## 6.3 Learning, a previously unavailable option

Education was another trend in the interviews and informal conversations with participants as it was part of their repertoire when discussing this technology. Latinas in this study, particularly those with a background of poverty, attached great value to it, partly because their constructions lead them to link internet use to a means of learning. They had been exposed to a series of messages, either from the mainstream and/or from family and friends, where the internet was presented as a positive aspect of a learning environment. Hence they referred to it as synonym for "encyclopaedia", and described it as "a place to obtain knowledge" and "a learning device". Some of these women had not had the opportunity to finish school, to find a non-manual occupation, or to pursue their interests. New technologies offered them the chance to explore these.

### *6.3.1 Nidia and Mr. Google*

'I am 55 but in my mind I am 35' Nidia (Colombian) stated with a big smile. We were in a small café in Kilburn, near Casa Latina. She liked to go to all kinds of classes at the community centre to keep her mind 'busy'. As other participants, she arrived in London two decades ago to help her sister who was about to give birth. There she met her Spanish neighbour, who later became her husband, and they settled in the city. However, her marriage didn't end well due severe domestic violence and her spouse's alcoholism. Moreover, Nidia suffered from a congenital malformation of her skull. This caused chronic pain, back problems and sporadic fainting. All of these prevented her having a regular job.

Her only son, with whom she lived, was a source of great happiness for her. He introduced her to technology and convinced her to buy a laptop a year and a half previously. She was allowed to use it when he was not at home. There she played games like Solitaire and made videocalls to Colombia. She also liked to research new places in the city so she could walk, which eased her

pain. She organised her trips by using tourist websites and others such as "What's on in London"[40], and also looked up the route in advance on the transport webpage TFL. These activities helped her to feel young and more connected to her teenage son:

> *I am older than many people but I don't want to be mentally old. If I am rejuvenated is because I am up-to-date with technologies. This makes easier communication with my son. I don't want my son to say we don't speak because I don't understand anything. No, I want him to feel we are at the same level, and that If he says something I can reply "oh yes I know about it", to be at his rhythm, though it is not completely possible to me because everything goes so fast… the evolution of the electronic system in the world has a fast pace, but that gives me strength to go on* (Nidia, 55, Colombian).

For Nidia, using technology was a way to remain young, a challenge she was willing to take. She *tamed* the internet, and found a way to incorporate it into her daily routine. It was fuelled by her desire to somehow feel modern and to remain connected to her son. Although this was a major step due her background of few educational opportunities, recently she started to use computers and internet successfully. In her precarious situation, particularly due to her physical impediments, technology was perceived as a source of knowledge she had never encountered before:

> *The internet was like to find another door where I could go in and research more… I very much like to go to the web, to research and to know, though I was a little scared at first to go to webpages that you shouldn't. Not now because I found that you can ask everything to Mr Google and he gives you the answer, and that helps me go further … The internet is like a library… it is an electronic library because everything you want to know or research is a click away. It is that simple! Everything you want, Mr Google gives it to you.* (Nidia, 55, Colombian)

Nidia stressed that she found researching on the web very rewarding. There she looked for information about the city and also about her health. The internet made knowledge available and close, in her living room. The consequences were multiple: to feel empowered, to gain a certain degree of independence, and to understand some of the technological jargon her son habitually used. All this helped her to feel up-to-date and included. Thus, regardless of the extent of their activities and the anxieties that brought, participants who had started their technological journey

[40] http://www.whatsoninlondon.co.uk/

sounded enthusiastic when talking about it. They related this to advancing, growing and feeling more comfortable with it. Marta was particularly clear about this point:

> *The internet is a way to communicate, a way to learn, a way to go forward in life, like when you are advancing in steps, then you learnt how to walk and then you want to learn something more. The technology is something like that and it is good for all people because it opens a world in your head.* (Marta, 64, Colombian)

Nidia and Marta seemed to see the internet as a launch pad. They also had an everything-is-possible attitude that was part of the messages related to technologies they were exposed to. Thus they had a positive - albeit perhaps overenthusiastic - view of the technology reflecting its collective within their group. The internet indeed constituted their access to a rich information source for the first time, though using it was not yet in complete accordance with their discourses and expectations. There was also a lack of awareness about its less positive sides. For example, Nidia declared a blind confidence on "Mr Google": for her it was as trustworthy as a library. However, she was unaware of how important it is to evaluate the sources beyond the search engine. Marta went one step further: for her it was not only education, but to a way to go forward in life, away from a history of lack of opportunities and feeling left behind. For these two women, to be able to use the internet was a distinctive sign of being part of something, an acknowledgement of their capabilities, and the opportunity to learn about it was indeed a sign of development.

To what extent this knowledge would help further their sense of empowerment and how it could be translated into their everyday lives has been discussed in the literature. Scholars have pointed to civic engagement, political participation, potential improvements in job and educational prospects, among others (Munck, 2005; Norris, 2001; Schoffield, 2003; van Dijk 2005, 2006). Yet these sorts of direct, "positive" effects are not part of these women's experiences but nevertheless affected their quality of life. Though it would not materialise in a change in their migration status or in a salary increase, their literacy, their sense of achievement and the extent of their knowledge about certain topics might be just as rewarding. For example, for Nidia there were clear effects on her independence and her approach to the city. It was also a way to look for validation from her son, which helped her to cope with marginalisation.

### *6.3.2 YouTube education*

Continuing with the cohort of participants who lacked education, just to learn something new was of interest from the outset. For example they embraced their stay in London as an opportunity to become fluent in English, for the sake of having a second language. They wanted to increase their education by all means possible, and understandably this included getting to know how to use the internet and computers, iPods and so forth. This was clearer in those who enrolled in computer classes. They devoted time and effort to learning different uses of the computer, or simply to the experience of learning. Many of them came from a background of poverty. Their past of low paid jobs, together with family financial responsibilities, had hindered their access to and use of the internet in Latin America. There, access to new technologies was mainly linked to socioeconomic resources, and education systems had only slowly started to incorporate it (Cepal 2010, 2013a, 2013b; Trucco, 2013).

This situation changed drastically once they had settled in a developed country with high internet penetration. In London they encountered peers who had regular access, which tended to make them feel embarrassed, ignorant and helpless. This was difficult for those who did not have the opportunity to attend computer classes and therefore could not count on the assistance of a teacher to provide more formal guidance and support. Furthermore, they had not developed formal learning skills that would have helped them to cope with the challenges of being a new user. Yet this could be compensated for with social network support.

> *[I learnt how to use the internet when I came to the UK] because I had friends who always went to chat online and I never went because I was embarrassed to tell them that I didn't know how, but they kept inviting me. My response was usually 'no I don't want to' and I was embarrassed to admit to them I didn't know even how to switch on a computer.* (Andrea, 34, Bolivian)

According to Andrea, "Before, in order to know how to use a computer formal studies were required, but not now". She did not go to school, had no formal education of any kind and she had been a cleaner her entire life. Three years ago, for the first time, she told her husband she didn't know how to turn on a computer. She was ashamed and for this reason she never joined her friends in the cybercafé. However, she received what she called a "second chance in life". Such second chances – as many others know - happened because they were in a country where access to computers and to internet connections was possible. For Andrea, it was a luxury to have a computer at home, and having the iPod her husband recycled is something that would have never happened in her native Bolivia. Now she is very attached to it, as it is the device on which she watches episodes of a science fiction show she is a fan of. And there is one extra perk: she learned from it.

> *During the day I cannot use it (the iPod) because I don't have any free time, but in the night I do. Every night when I come from work I go to my room and catch the internet from the computer in my iPod, and I watch "Imperfect Crimes" in bed. It is a show about forensic investigations; these are episodes where they investigate criminals. I watch it on YouTube and I love it! I love it because you learn! There are episodes, most of them from the US and others from Australia, Canada, but they are in Spanish… and you learn a lot because forensic people are incredible, INCREDIBLE!.* (Andrea, 34, Bolivian).

From Andrea's point of view her night sessions on YouTube were meant to be entertainment, but were also an opportunity to learn about forensics. Regardless of their backgrounds, participants remarked on valuing the internet as a chance to learn - for example, Valeria or Elisa, who were proud of the recipes they had learnt from YouTube. It was valuable for them to expand their cookery knowledge – among other things - thanks to the net. Sometimes they were vague about what/why they were learning: "to know about computers" or "to learn everything about it" were usual responses. Arguably, this is linked to the fact that the meanings negotiated by these women and their peers in relation to the internet were in essence that technology is unequivocally good, as in Francisca's words:

> *Technologies are really important in the world we live in and it will continue being so because nowadays everything is technology, everything: television, phones, messages, everything is internet, the easy, the practical, the fast...* (Francisca, 41, Colombian)

Other participants who did not need to attend classes - because they had either more experience or a support network - also engaged in learning, for example, using the internet to practise English or visit pages where they could do exercises. Milena, however, was the only participant who took and finished a proper, online English course. In general they focused on furthering their interest in, for example, Photoshop, cookery, health or religion. None of these was any kind of formal education, but a casual access to knowledge that they perceived and described as 'online education'. This was very motivating for them and took different forms. Furthermore, learning and being able to develop digital skills were also linked to the expressions of independence and empowerment mentioned in the previous subsection. Being able to learn how to use technology was a major step for many of them, including Andrea, who describes being able to use the internet as 'a personal development, the starting of a new stage in my life'. Although their skills remained basic and the activities they performed were limited to communication and leisure, in their discourse technology was one of the greatest advances and

learning experiences which everyone had the right to use, and should know how. There was a sense of achievement related to learning and being knowledgeable - a great step for them.

> *It was a marvellous sensation: you feel intelligent, you feel independent, and you feel like you are really part of the world. Because I was a woman who for years and years had to work, and work, and work and never ever got any of this through my mind, nor got to use a mobile phone, or a computer, or a digital camera, nothing, nothing of that. I never in my life knew how to use any of that because I was very humble, I was simply a mother and never knew about this stuff... I left school when I was 15 years old and now I feel so important that I do know how to use these things.* (Francisca, 41, Colombian)

What Francisca describes as feelings of independence, intelligence and being part of the world is what best summarises the descriptions and accounts of participants, particularly those who faced computers and the internet for the first time as adults and while in a foreign country. The women who attended the computer classes also expressed gratitude because, beyond the fact that they learnt something, they were exposed to an experience of education, with a teacher, in a classroom, with a timetable, etc. This in itself encouraged them to attend, and women who were usually marginalised appreciated the opportunity to be part of it. Moreover, technology as a social construction sent a powerful message to society and across spheres. As Francisca observed, to be connected is to be in the world. Their experiences therefore contribute to the furthering the debate and to understanding the extent to which the use of technologies can bring about improvements in conditions of marginalisation or social exclusion.

## 6.4 Conclusion

One of the challenges of deconstructing the concept of connected immigrants and the role of the internet for people establishing a life abroad is to be able to recognise the point of departure from which they are interpreting technologies. The shades of their experiences are rooted in their cultural codes and gender roles, in the everyday realities of a strange culture and in the options available to them. This is, of course, a very broad range of topics. Nonetheless, they are interwoven in the process of internet appropriation. For this reason the objective of this chapter was to look beyond domestication elements and to focus on cultural attachments and understandings and transnational relationships, to help unpack the role of the technology in view of the particularities of their circumstances.

From the data I have identified three main areas as crucial to the Latina's digital construction. The first is the internet as a communication device, used particularly for communicating with close family. Although they maintained other forms of communication, such as mailed letters and phone calls, they perceived in the internet a rich channel where they could 'see' their family members. Images were of great importance and therefore pictures and video calls were a strong motivation to embrace the technology. This depended on whether their relatives at home had, for instance, internet access and digital skills to respond to the communications (e.g. email accounts, video-call platforms).

Language was also relevant, this time as a limitation on their access to cultural consumption. Their limited English prevented them from accessing the mainstream media. There were exceptions though, such as with popular shows like X Factor, which required little language understanding. Yet in the majority of the cases the internet was perceived as an opportunity to carry on the consumption practices they had had in their home countries. What it is interesting to scrutinise is their consumption choices, and how they mostly continued making similar cultural choices to those they made in their home country. Although it is not possible to classify everything they watched exclusively as culturally relevant to them, it is pertinent to highlight their tendency to choose content from Latin America in Spanish language (originally or in translation). This was particularly important because, like images, it enhanced their sense of closeness and identification. Both perspectives led them to experience a transnational life, with ties in their home countries that were reflected in their everyday communications, family roles and consumption. Thus, even though they lived in London, the depth and intensity of these practices made the internet a device that enabled them to remain close to their countries of origin. They digitally positioned their homes outside London, since the messages they received and negotiated, as well as their relationships, were more closely connected with their home countries. However, they were not completely isolated, which is why I will argue they are in between cultures, since they can choose certain messages but also have to deal those from the mainstream.

Finally, we turned to the role of education and empowerment provided by using the internet as a means to access knowledge. Technology had been socialised as a way to go further in life. In particular the women with little formal education received the message that the internet was crucial to being included in society and to progressing. This technology is much more accessible in a developed country than in their countries of origin. Thus, living in London was again perceived as an opportunity for learning and for personal development. They valued highly the opportunity to use the internet and perceived it as a source of education, particularly video platforms and search engines. The simple fact that they were able to use them was valued

as education. They described feeling part of something rather than left behind as previously. They expressed feeling rewarded and empowered when using the internet to no matter what extent.

Overall, as immigrants, these women had new options, but also new challenges, including those of staying close to their traditions and their culture, and continuing their family roles despite distance. In this context, the internet was a choice because it offered alternatives for communication, finding information, and also for integrating. The internet also presented many challenges on different levels, such as those of access, of various uses, and of ensuring that their families in Latin America followed in their technological footsteps. Still this does not mean that they were no longer marginalised. On the contrary, it shows how they dealt with marginalisation and the role of the internet in that process.

# CHAPTER VII

## An empirical and theoretical approach to untangling Latina migrants' internet construction

Domestication theory has come a long way from when it was conceived in a simpler world without all the progress and possibilities that we have on hand today. The internet has bring brought a paradigmatic change in how people communicate with each other, how they inform and pass spread information, and in many others aspects such as those related to work and leisure. The wide spread of this technology has also changed the landscape of migration. - For for example, by bringing closer distant places of belonging or enabling transnational links with family and friends back home. Yet these are not consequences not of the technology as such, but of what people have made of it. This is why it is relevant to explore how, from its multiple possibilities and affordances, users take what makes sense to them and appropriate in a way that would fit suits their interest and needs within the particularities of their everyday lives. How people give meaning to technologies, and the role these have play, remain as valid questions.

Domestication theory provides useful concepts for exploring the why and the how of technologies in people's lives and the meanings that arise from them. Nonetheless it is impossible to ignore the fact that meaning, practices and contexts are challenged by the rise of an era of mobility and migration. When the focus of the study is a migrant population there are aspects linked to the nature of these connections in transnational terrain and sociocultural contexts that need to be addressed and put into context. Under this new light it becomes relevant to explore how domestication's premises and concepts untangle internet construction, and to what extent the data may need input from other theories to make sense of it. Thus the aim of this chapter is to discuss how domestication helps to explain these women's construction of the internet, and to what extent migrants and transnational premises should be considered in the debate. I will be guided by the main empirical questions addressing the meanings associated with the internet; why, in a context of vulnerability and within the frame of their everyday lives they appropriate it; and the sociocultural context from where they take the elements that lead them to technological choices and add to internet constructions. In the second part of the chapter I will tackle some of the theoretical implications of conducting a domestication study of migrant populations with access to the internet, so as to position the households in a physical as well as digital landscape. Finally, I will expand on the concepts of technological trajectories and redomestication. These proved useful in my research and deserve far more attention in

domestication literature when researching not only migrant populations but domestication in these days of the internet.

## 7.1 Latinas in front of the screen

The premise that has guided this thesis is that the internet is not a generic device; on the contrary people shape it according to their own contexts, interests and capabilities. To comprehend how users construct it the first step is to getting to know such users: the women that were in front of the screen of the computer, or smartphone, or IPod. It is from their experiences that clues arise for understanding both how they relate to their everyday and how it is compounded. Therein lie the codes they use to domesticate their web and the affordances they perceive in it. It is therefore pertinent to describe these women and position them in their everyday lives.

Scholars have labelled Latinos in London as an invisible community because government records do not officially recognise them as an ethnic group. Although this is changing over time, public services and political structures have offered them little support. Their socioeconomic status, quality of housing, manual and low paid jobs regardless of their previous experience and studies all contributed to their vulnerability. Furthermore, basic aspects such as communication issues (i.e. being unable to speak or understand English) hindered their everyday experiences and were continuous reminders of their position as foreigners. Though some of them faced legal issues concerning their migration status this was not true of all participants. Some, particularly those who had arrived a decade earlier, had been luckier in having obtained government support such as allocated flats. Despite these differences the main picture was one tinted by disadvantage and limited options.

Another issue is that their Latino cultural codes are not in concordance with those of British people. Despite the cultural diversity that reigns in the city and the many foreigners who reside there, they still characterised the 'other' or the 'British' as polite, cold, distant people, which highlighted their feeling as outsiders. They relied on fellow Latinos and/or on Latino centres and communities for company. Nonetheless they also found advantages on their migration journeys. The city itself was described as full of opportunities and a place to pursue goals including earning money, learning English, acquiring technologies, pursuing European entitlements, and education for their children. The women that came from an impoverished background also encountered free technology classes and availability of computers and internet. They took advantage of this opportunity and in a familiar context they were able to start their internet domestication.

From a gender perspective, as women they had great responsibilities, particularly for their families. They were mothers, wives, aunts and daughters who took care of others. As they moved countries their roles became more evident. The testimonies I heard included, for example, taking care of a lonely husband, but continuing to be a mother at distance, or keeping a sister or a daughter company. There were also some who were completely alone and had left their families behind in their home towns, yet they worked hard to keep up the ties with their loved ones. The nuances of their stories were key to understanding why the opportunity to see and to hear their families and friends through a computer was so valuable to them. Thus at the core of their relationships lay one of the reasons why the internet was a part of their everyday lives.

Gender constructions were also present in how they relate to technologies and strategies of use. Many of the participants acquired technology for their children or family members, in London or back at home. They did so because they believed in its educational power and because it was an indication of progress. Yet many did not start using them until circumstances became harsh, for example due to distance and loneliness. Within families where other members were more confident users, women were relegated to second place. For example the husband or the children would decide where they would connect and when. In some extreme cases their relatives also objected that they would probably mess up the device or important files due to their lack of experience. Hence they were a source of great insecurities. Opposite situations were also encountered. For example partners or adult children were their main support, either encouraging or providing access (e.g.: by giving them a Blackberry or a recycled IPod) and also helping them to acquire skills and confidence.

### *7.1.1 A note on computers as a starting point*

It is well known that a multitude of platforms can provide access to the internet, even devices previously domesticated, such as mobile phones. Nonetheless, I shall give my attention to computers for two main reasons: first, they were the main point of access for participants in this research; and second, they are no mundane, easy-to-use devices - far from it. I am certain that, for people who have never encountered a computer before, using one to domesticate the internet involves extra complexity that is not always acknowledged. Although I realise that number of individuals in this situation is nowadays small, it is still a major theme because their domestication implies that the second articulation – the reading of the device - is a particularly complicated journey. Computers are designed with users in mind, but users who are part of a technological world and rather than users who have been marginalised. The logic, the language

used and the interface make no concessions to non-English-speakers, people without good dexterity or even with sight problems. As Leung (2005) argues, these were not produced for minorities, and a proportion of my participants were an example of this. It also demonstrated what happens when interpretations clash with what has been culturally designed.

This is also an argument in favour of dedicating more time to knowing who the user is and how close to or far from technology they have generally been. For example, someone who has been part of an educational system, computers were probably once familiar - or at least not entirely strange. Although computers are nowadays more common, they are not intuitive and require several skills, including both physical handling and basic computing concepts. When these are being acquired all at once, as a first step to going online, the process can be discouraging. The second articulation cannot be ignored either, because how people read the device has a direct effect on their experience with the messages. For example, it could be that users mix up device and message. Women in this research who attended computer and internet classes focused their attention on knowing how to use the computer in order to use the internet, ignoring all the other activities they could use them for. The computer could be in the background and domesticated only as an online access device.

### *7.1.2 The internet: a broad understanding*

London meant many things for my participants, and so did the internet. It played a diversity of roles linked to entertainment, such as the television where they watched their favourite soap operas; to communication, as a medium from which they could maintain ties with close family at a distance; to information, the key to unlocking vast sources of knowledge. It was among these three main pillars that each of these women, with different levels of digital skills and confidence, shaped the technology. Some of their discourses about it were over-optimistic, referring to the internet as an "almighty" technology where everything was possible, or a place where knowledge was stored and made available to everyone with a connection. These perceptions were not based on what they had done, but on what they had heard, and on their expectations. This was also the reason why their discourses of friendly and easy-to-use technology sometimes clashed with their experience. For more knowledgeable participants, the technology was perceived as a friend, a helper and a companion on their transnational adventure. It was something that had not really changed when they moved countries, although there had been a re-accommodation of the role, which before had usually been part of their work and leisure activities. They now took advantage of their online skills for new needs and as their point of connection with their families, rather than as part of their new occupations.

#### 7.1.2.1 A connection to the home country and to London

The internet also meant connection, which was mainly expressed on two levels. One was the connection with London, since through the web they carried out activities that helped them to go outside their homes, to experience the world they were now part of. These were interpreted as practices that helped them to live as immigrants, for example when they used it as a translation device, or to look for information about the city or, in some rare cases, for services. It was a way to disentangle some of their current reality by accessing maps, websites with transport or other information; it was a key to finding information and a 'safer' way of communicating with English people without the pressure of speaking with them.

It was also a point of connection with their home country and distant family as these became just 'a click away'. The internet was perceived as a window from where they could see their families, friends and home towns. Facebook, Messenger and Skype were among their priorities. This facilitated their continuation of roles in the family and their remaining close despite distance, feeding their need to make use of the web. However, the degree of these connections varied greatly. For example some participants regularly used platforms such as video-calls to see and hear their relatives. Others were starting their domestication process with the expectation of reconnecting or gaining closeness.

#### 7.1.2.2 Distraction and continuity of practices

News, soap operas, music, images of and information about their home countries were also available over this connection. This was why Cartel TV, YouTube and Wikipedia were also in their repertoire. It was an extension of their interest and how they understood the net as a place to connect with their interests and to expand them, and reflected what attracted them. In this regard it was a sort of emotional choice, a place to find ontological security and cultural codes in tune with the content they consumed. It enabled them to continue some cultural consumption practices and to experience something that might give a sense of normality and familiarity. It was also an escape, albeit temporary, from the anxieties and troubles of their everyday lives.

Their media consumption choices were also practical. Their illiteracy affected many aspects of their lives. Their limited social networks and cultural consumption mirrored this. On the web they found alternative ways to access the mainstream media as well as options for spending their free time. Beyond cultural attachment was a question of what was actually available to them, and on the net they had far more possibilities of finding something more suitable to their

situation. Thus the internet was perceived to some extent in a similar way to traditional media such as television or radio.

#### 7.1.2.3 A way to go forward in life

The internet was also a place to learn and an opportunity to develop. There they could find information and knowledge that would fulfil their interests and/or make them feel more valuable. Thus the learning aspect of the net was twofold: the option of learning how to use the web itself or online applications, and the content they could acquire though its use. This is linked to the meta-meaning of the internet which goes beyond the affordances perceived in a particular context. This technology was charged with messages, discourses and expectations before it was acquired. Participants who were starting its domestication argued that to be internet users was to be part of the world, to be able to make use of something that others were already part of.

However modest their practices, they reported feeling independent and empowered by using it. Yet this came with a price because anxieties and frustrations were part of the process, so there was a feeling of inclusion vis-à-vis a feeling of being inadequate, not intelligent or capable enough of make use of it. Nonetheless for illiterate persons, stuck in manual jobs, or who had not been to school, having the chance to access and learn how to use a device such as a computer or a mobile phone with internet access was a major step. It was perceived as a way to go forward in life. Furthermore, this was mentioned as one of the advantages of living in a developed country, in contrast with the opportunities offered in their home countries. This experience was valued as a positive change, a new opportunity to be included and to feel better about themselves, even with all the anxieties and frustration reported.

### *7.1.3 Reasons for engagement vis-à-vis vulnerabilities*

It has been argued that people from low socioeconomic status, with less education, and from ethnic minorities are less likely to go online. Likewise it is expected that the resources they have on hand and their everyday circumstances pose barriers to their digital engagement. Nonetheless from my research I will argue it is precisely because of their social, economic, and cultural experiences that these women, in a context of migration, pursued the domestication of the internet. They integrated the technology into their lives to greatly varying degrees and with diverse extent of use and confidence. Yet the reasons behind their use in a context of vulnerability were based on similar aspects: language, access to particular content or media,

communication, availability and in some cases because the device, in comparison to others, best suited their overcrowded accommodation.

Their vulnerabilities were also apparent in the differences in how they handled the internet. For example, expectations and discourses negotiated were not necessarily in concordance with all the activities participants performed. This was because, although they saw it as a 'must' for progress, not all of them had had the opportunity to develop the skills required to make use of all its perceived potentials. Therefore, it is interesting to contrast their views and discourses with the place and role that it really had in their lives. For example, for some of the elderly participants, the computer and digital skills were useful but still just an 'extra' in their lives. It was a slow process that would take more time and effort for them to fully incorporate it into their daily practices, especially for those without access at home.

The internet also seemed, for them, to be interchangeable with traditional media, and some participants turned to it for television or radio. Quoting Morley (2006) '…even the latest technologies can always be adapted (or 'domesticated') to suit traditional purposes' (p. 29). They used it as a platform for accessing these media, but neglected other possibilities of having a computer at home because they did not know how to use any other software, it did not seem relevant and/or they were not interested. The device and the technology, then, were combined in order to emulate traditional media, accessing content that they otherwise could not access. So there were times when they watched television or listened to radio through the computer, but did not count this as computer/internet time. This was because the affordances and the construction they made of the internet were as a radio or television. Interestingly they did not realise how the computer was the enabler of their other media experiences and associated these practices with the other media (i.e. 'I watch soap operas' rather than 'I use the computer to watch soap operas'). Some used it for extended hours but did not register this as computer time, honestly not connecting these activities with computer use. The opposite was the case when they were looking for information, or pursuing activities to explore or expand their interests. In this case they did give credit to the internet, in concordance with their views about the use of computers and the web as closely related to information-seeking and education.

From their accounts it seems to me that the discussion about how vulnerable people make use of technology should turn from 'despite' their circumstances to 'because of' their circumstances. In other words, by looking at their everyday lives and the nuances of their situations as migrants in precarious situations it is possible to understand why they invest time, economic and other kinds of resources in getting online. I would exemplify these by summarising my participants' five key reasons for accommodating the internet into their everyday lives:

(a) Language: Poor English literacy was among the most common reasons for Latinas to use the internet, either to help them cope with their lack of literacy or to escape from this by accessing messages they could understand. Nonetheless, language represented the beginning of much vulnerability, since it drove them into a circle of limited options concerning jobs (and salaries), social networks, and access to and use of basic services such as healthcare. The problem was a lack of both time and money to attend a proper English course. Therefore they needed to manage a device with which they could, better cope with English, learn, translate or find information online that was otherwise very difficult for them to access, and with which they could access media they could understand.

(b) Access to specific content or other media: Linked to the previous point, their lack of English guided their media consumption and other consumption practices. However it was more than this because, through the specific messages selected, they reconnected with their cultural identity and roots. They also found ontological security by encountering the opportunity to replicate consumption practices that were familiar. The internet could be used to emulate other media, becoming their newspaper, radio and television, providing access to content that was relevant, interesting or in accord with their cultural codes and interests.

(c) Communication in a context of isolation/marginalisation: To connect with family, which was dispersed or in their home country, was vital. This was because they came from a culture that places much importance on family ties, but also because in their current context they had limited social networks and were not part of an established or organised community. The distress caused by the distance – both geographical and emotional - was palliated by the exchange of pictures, emails, chain PowerPoint messages, or by the use of social networks to 'see' what others were doing. Online video calls and chats also provided relief, but successful communication relied on certain skills and software being available to both parties.

(d) Advantages of the access device in overcrowded/poor accommodation: Accessing the internet means using other media, often in difficult living conditions in restricted accommodation. The computer (particularly a laptop) serves as a television and a radio, and is particularly convenient because of the small space it takes. Its mobility also fuels

engagement because it can provide privacy, or in some houses 'free' Wi-Fi in specific spots.

(e) Availability: For those who had not previously had the opportunity to use the internet or a computer, living in a developed country meant more opportunities to do so. For example, they attended the community classes because these finally offered them the opportunity to be part of something they had long heard about, symbolising progress and a first step towards achieving other dreams. This was fuelled by the satisfaction of the feelings of independence and sense of empowerment reported, although they were facing new anxieties, frustration and insecurities.

Notwithstanding that there are a great variety of vulnerabilities and grey areas as to how these are experienced every day, their accounts led me to conclude that in their case internet engagement did not end up in a greater social engagement (i.e. active participation in society). As data from this research shows their reasons for getting connected were not directly linked to being part of the British mainstream society. Their needs and interest were related to emotional needs (connecting with family and friends) and also to practical circumstances (translation, communication). Participants perceived these affordances from the internet precisely because of their context, interests and a need to improve their everyday migration experience. Yet it did not become a tool that per se increased their English literacy or advance their jobs prospects.

In the light of these results it is an understatement to argue that inclusion in society needs more than technological skills and fixes. These women are an example of how regardless of their degree of digital inclusion they were unlikely to achieve social inclusion, which was obstructed by circumstances that went beyond technical expertise (e.g. legal issues, work restrictions, language problems). Becoming internet users did not imply that they had overcome their invisibility, and they continued to be vulnerable and detached from the mainstream. Still this is a grey area because they were encouraged by opportunities presented online to somehow diminish their isolation or language barriers, despite these opportunities being temporary and not extensive solutions.

Likewise, participants' experiences lead me to argue that the 'power' of connection of the net does not necessarily mean connection with a particular society. When individuals are part of a transnational scenario it becomes more difficult to untangle the characteristics and impacts of this inclusion, and how it relates to other, more permanent kinds of marginalisation. Yet what appears contradictory is that the internet helped them to reconnect, but with a distant outside,

not with the society they were currently living in. Then they were in a strange place, apparently marginalised in terms of British society but with the perception of inclusion in/connection to their home country. Furthermore, some of their 'online fixes' did not necessarily motivate them to learn English: on the contrary they helped them to carry on without it. On the other hand the messages they negotiated were part of the Latino element, which strengthened their transnational ties through connection to cultural roots and language while diminishing their chance of using their digital engagement to fully integrate or connect with London. In consequence their homes were also positioned in a grey area, leading them to a life between cultures that impacted their everyday reality, where they reported feeling closer to their home country, but disconnected from London.

Overall the internet became to some extent part of their everyday lives. They constructed it in a way that enabled them to continue some cultural consumption practices, to disentangle some of their current reality by accessing maps, websites with transport or other information, and/or to find a mental escape. However, the essential thing was to remain connected, to have this window from where they could see their families, friends and hometowns. Although participants showed very dissimilar skills and confidence of use, and not all of them have fully domesticated the internet, I cannot ignore how through this appropriation they were empowered. Though they did not complete all the stages of fully domesticating it, overall they reported a positive feeling that encouraged them to persevere. Participants expressed a sense of inclusion despite the modesty of their interactions with technology. They had the satisfaction of being connected, not left behind, and this affected how they approached technologies, helping them to develop hobbies, to look for information, to share with others, which in turn had an overall influence on their immigration experiences.

### *7.1.4 The roles of sociocultural context and their transnational links*

Where domestication happens is extremely important. Silverstone and colleagues have pointed to the home as the primary place where messages are negotiated and meanings arise. These are in continuous dialogue with other inhabitants as well as in harmony with technologies previously purchased. Furthermore, it is in the household that a particular role is acquired and that strategies of usage and practices arise. Therefore when speaking about location, domestication scholars have been very careful to detail the environment, the family and the surroundings of the ICT in question. The cultural codes, social understandings and experiences of immigrants were all included in these accounts of the day-to-day lives of participants. Still there are two situations, both linked to context and triggered by migration, which I cannot be

certain are addressed from this view. The first is the intricate effects of participants' transnational connections.

These are part of their social situation but not concrete, inviting reconsideration of where the house is positioned and the nature of messages that are negotiated. I would therefore like to restate the importance of location and expand it to the sociocultural context and links by including the experiences women have outside the home. Furthermore, when context changes it become easier to perceive a change in affordances, and ultimately meanings. This happened for example to women that domesticated the internet prior to migration, and then with change of country and living situation they reassessed their use of technology. Though domestication explains why and how people give meaning to technologies, when people who are experiencing migration lead the process it becomes clear that some of these elements are not directly addressed by the theory. The multi-nodality of a transnational home, the detachment from a culture, the extent of isolation and limited social networks, all have an effect. This is no longer a matter of domestication in merely a household, but in a household where people have the agency to select media and messages in accordance with their interests, cultural attachments and skills.

Media literature contributes elements that can be linked and built upon through transnationalism and migration studies, such as ontological security analysed from a transnational perspective. The feeling of reassurance provided by being able to continue with consumption practices from a time prior to migration holds part of the answer to why migrants, in difficult socioeconomic circumstances, invest in devices such as those that can connect them to the internet. Furthermore to enable rituals to be continued by creating a space that connects with a distant geography. The device acquires a role as an emulator of traditional media or as the means of access to the web as such, and these women, as migrants with difficulties in engaging with their new host societies, crave it. In a context of invisibility and great cultural differences, to be able to access a place of belonging was crucial. As some of the participants expressed, they travelled via the internet. When an individual watched the soap opera or the news that she used to watch back home, she was no longer in London, she was in her old living room in Colombia, or Chile, or any other country of origin. Cultural and social circumstances challenged perceptions and meanings previously attached to new technologies, shaping affordances that in this scenario were linked to the creation of new practices and/or the perpetuation of others. The messages, the conversations and the 'products' of these consumption practices were in accord with those of their friends and family, enhancing their sense of closeness. This ontological security also represented the power that environment has over cultural consumption. In other words, this change of contexts and its characteristics were what fed this basic need for belonging. In this

regard, transnational literature positions the media as an important source of the process of giving meaning to ICTs, and of the role that these play in their experiences.

The relevance comes from the close interplay between context and affordances and interpretations. For example, these women's technological points of departure were different. This influenced how they approached the internet in terms of both confidence and experience. Later, they were on common ground as migrants in a disadvantaged position and had similar occupations, limited social networks, and English literacy issues. They also had common attributes such as cultural understandings, migration condition and vulnerabilities. This social and cultural context was a strong influence and led their practices and interests to converge. Hence shared context was to some extent linked to shared meanings, even though how they positioned themselves in the technological arena remained dissimilar. The differences I encountered among participants are now useful for exemplifying how their sociocultural context and opportunities played a part in their domestication. For example, those who became online users prior to their immigration or under less stressful circumstances had appropriated the internet mainly as a communication, entertainment or/and work device. And it was precisely because of this background and level of involvement that their technological experiences as migrants were slightly different yet with common meanings. They approached the internet as a familiar object where they carried out activities that provided ontological security and a sense of normality in a context where they faced new kinds of challenges and vulnerabilities. They had re-accommodated to a new life and so had their access to technology and the uses they made of it.

On the other hand, there were women who had not had such opportunities and were now starting out, finding the net for the first time as an exciting but complex technology. They encountered difficulties in the domestication phases trying to incorporate and convert it. Furthermore if we took into account only their experiences prior to arriving in the UK, they would seem very different users. Some of them perhaps would not be users at all because of the composition of their everyday lives and also because their needs for communication, information and entertainment could be met by other media. Furthermore, despite having computers in their homes, or husbands and children making use of the internet, in a number of cases these women were not entitled to use it or had not found the confidence or the need to do so. As migrants in London it became an opportunity either in a community centre for Latinos or because they had found another kind of support. Also they were motivated both by what they had heard and what they had seen for themselves that it was possible to achieve.

#### 7.1.4.1 Migrants' economies

Discussions, interests and the kinds of interaction that users share outside the technological stream shed light, among other things, on how the device is appropriated and the role that it can play. This is a line of thought that supports the idea that the moral economy is indeed a rich source of data touching on both intentions and contexts. For example, in Casa Latina the moral economy the students shared was based on cultural elements, as well as on connections to their countries of birth. Furthermore, all participants were immersed in a friendly Latino environment that strength their own social rules. This environment served as a resource for making sense of how computers and the internet were framed in this context. Indeed it was this situation that encouraged them to attend, to socialise amongst peers and to be part of the community. The technology was also an incentive, mixed with the idea of appropriating the internet among friends and in a safe environment. The activities performed in classes and the conversations continually touched on cultural ties, leaving the internet in a second place. It follows that if Latino codes and ties mainly fed their moral economy, the internet would play a large role in extending their existing communications, and acting as a lens to identify and interpret new codes, and to enhance previous consumption practices or create new and related ones.

However, the moral economy also invites us to reflect on the nature of the world outside the household or the community centre from which the messages are received. Therefore when Domestication theory looks at the public sphere, it seems to me that it suggests a rather static geography in the sense that this is an identifiable unit that is rooted to a very specific place, in other words where the household and community centre is physically located. Nonetheless the clichéd "end of frontiers" attributed to technologies such as the internet and satellite television transforms this outside into a more complex, even messy, one. On the other hand, users are empowered when multiple options arise by having the opportunity to choose the origin of the messages they access, their language, their context and their source, by actively *locating* their household in different and/or multiple geographies. The internet then challenges a fixed location while enhancing the translocality of the home. This led me to reflect on the dynamic between the moral economy and the outside, the public, the extent to which it is possible to choose the messages, giving the moral economy a particular shape.

As analysed above, participants' moral economies relied heavily on their Latino roots in terms of messages they negotiated and people they were in close contact with. Their domestication process was conducted in London yet the messages they could potentially negotiate were not from their immediate London reality but from their home countries. This is a recursive process where it is impossible to be certain of what comes first and what comes as a consequence. In

other words: is it the moral economy that is responsible for selecting/restricting the messages that shape domestication? Or is it the previous domestication that shapes the messages influencing a new process of domestication of different devices? A similar situation, but in a different context, was the environment of the Casa Latina classes. Here conversations, messages and social rules were dictated by Latinos giving life to a moral economy that was also culturally linked to them, despite being located in London. Both these environments – the home and Casa Latina - resulted in the domestication process unfolding in a particular situation. In this regard, despite living in a different country, the moral economy of participants, their messages and overall processes, were dominated by codes with which they felt a connection – something that was only possible because they had multiple options for selecting messages. Overall, the content of the interactions that I could observe and their interests towards maintaining their ties led me to reflect on how they attempt to somehow maintain their moral economy despite moving countries.

If the gains are those of being more connected in terms of relationships and messages, because of somehow being able to replicate a distant 'outside the doorstep', then it is worth considering the cost. Although I will try to avoid framing the discussion in terms of the exclusion/inclusion dichotomy, it is my impression that the price paid for this tailored moral economy was that they ended up more disconnected from their current societal surroundings and/or from the entire complexity of their outside. This was mainly because the moral economy is compounded not only by the messages selected, but also by routines, beliefs, values, culture and social networks. It is easier to see how the internet brought these connections to them and how it fed the process, leading them to a moral economy that did not necessarily relate to the 'doorstep' of the household as argued by Silverstone and colleagues. In this context, then, the moral economy was not stable and had a hybridity component, while it reinforced exclusion, which at this point was a mixture of social components (vulnerabilities, inability to speak the language, the nature of their jobs, their social invisibility) and their own choices. Therefore in this regard internet consumption was the result of options, interests and capabilities, and had a direct effect on their moral economy. Yet despite the nature of their selection they are not completely isolated but between cultures, affecting other aspects of their domestication processes.

#### 7.1.4.2 Articulations under a new light

Articulations reflect on the device as a medium and are enablers of the messages that come from outside the home and are later negotiated. As discussed, the internet is an interactive platform where Latinas used their agency to select the kind of messages they consumed. In this context, and mainly fed by their transnational links, Latinas were largely guided by their cultural

attachments. This had repercussions on how restricted the messages were that they negotiated, increasing their isolation from society. It also presented a tension because despite their choices they were somehow part of British society and thus could not ignore it. These contradictions leave in evidence the multi-nodal location of the household and their different points of interactions, providing a diverse transnational (Georgiou, 2013). Therefore I will avoid classifying this into black and white because it is a hybrid that speaks of tensions between where the home is physically located and where the messages come from that feed the moral economy.

The symbolic context of the women's consumption was also affected by their transnational connections and vulnerable positions. The internet is a connection with the people that are on the other side of the screen, but also can be seen as a connection with the person sitting next to them. For example, a mother and a son, confined in a small shared room, may watch movies on a laptop after an exhausting day. For this mother, what is really relevant is doing something with her son. In the context of their situation, then, consuming the internet gave her relief, not solely because of the content accessed but because of how it happened. In other cases the outlets were not so positive, such as women that consumed the internet in a context of loneliness, and did so to forget and to de-stress.

For women who were redomesticating the internet, although they did not face a completely new device to be tamed, they did have to adapt it to this new scenario. In the process there would be certain features and practices that remained significant and did not change, while others may have become irrelevant. Therefore, because of the change in the social and material place where the device is positioned and used, its meaning and role were transformed in accordance with the new needs and interests presented: it was redomesticated. It was in the continuity of these practices that they found ontological security, impacting directly on the symbolic context of their consumption. In a migration context and under precarious conditions, the satisfaction of being able to perform some of these practices was highlighted. This is a process that goes beyond technological considerations and involves emotional ties that are triggered by foreigners and their need of cultural attachments.

#### 7.1.4.3 Latinas and their transnational links and ties

In the light of the empirical results, transnational literature proved helpful, particularly in addressing the emotional ties these women maintained and strengthened with their countries of origin. I therefore agree with scholars who claim that to understand such connections it is necessary to look at the everyday lives of participants, and specifically at the hardships they

face in a new environment (e.g. Werbner, 1997). Yet in this case their ties with the home country were neither related to political or economic matters, nor took the form of formal activities as some authors have suggested (Portes et al 1999; Schiller et al 1992). In my research the social component was predominant and mainly fuelled by cultural clashes. A significant proportion of participants' communication was the product of much needed social support, mainly due loneliness and lack of language skills; a support that was not necessarily encountered among migrant peers due to their different degrees of isolation.

Yet there is a point I need to make regarding these connections with their countries of origin. Though I acknowledge that ties with people that share their cultural codes can be classified according to their place of origin, what I found is that Latinas looked for ties with their significant others and close family, who were not always located in their home country. This finding confirms the view that transnational connections are made across borders and beyond the country of origin (Burrell and Anderson, 2008; Gielis, 2009; Vertovec 2009). Perhaps at first glance this can be seen as an obvious point to make; however I believe that transnational approaches would benefit from more nuanced clarification and openness about the nature of these ties. Therefore, instead of focusing on the location of such connections it would be helpful to also address the subject of them and the kind of ties that are established among individuals. This also would help to address the complexity of such networks when they spread to other countries due to stories of migration, as some of the participants forged meaningful relationships with non-Latino people in other non-Latin American countries. It is possible to address this in qualitative and ethnographic studies such as this one, which contributes to the nuances and intricacies of various transnational ties and connections. Furthermore, to reflect that these connections are not only made with people but also with media consumed, which at a first glance could be argue as not being transnational. An example is the participant that was very interested in royal issues, and specially the figure of the late Diana, Princess of Wales. She constantly consumed media on the subject, but in her native Spanish and not in English; she also was aware that she was a foreigner and an outside spectator of these events and social orders, but still her readings on the subject from Latino websites were more than a source of entertainment: it also helped her bond with her new country and provided her with a sense a satisfaction as she was gaining knowledge. This is, in my view, also a strand of transnational connection, although less developed and with other attributes, such as that the connection was made by an immigrant interested in the host culture, and her way to access it was through digital media in her native language and familiar to her. The specificity of this case and the elements involved speak of a sense of belonging (Georgiou, 2006) but also of different degrees and enactments of transnational links. This is why it is important to highlight the particularities of these women's routines, activities and everyday live, the specific context. Furthermore it echoes

Boccagni's (2012) suggestion that transnationalism should be evaluated as a social attribute that can be performed at a range of levels. This view enables a much more open and deep analysis of the everyday lives of these migrant women and helps to avoid a sort of checklist that can indicate whether transnational links exist or not. Again, such links are present but – as many of other aspects of their lives – with gradations and in different forms, rather than in a prescriptive and general way, which again underlines its complexity (Gielis, 2009; Nedelcu, 2012). Furthermore, these experiences stress the role of ICT as an enabler – not as a cause – of participants' degree of transnational links (Vertovec, 2009).

Finally, from the literature on transnationalism another point that has been stressed by various authors is the concept of there being a community of immigrants (Navarrete and Huerta, 2006). However, in my fieldwork this was not the case as among my participants there were very few and weak connections with other Latinos. Though I cannot claim that such Latino communities do not exist in London, in this research women had limited social connections in the host country and a more extended one either in their home country or in others such as those that some had migrated through before, as in the case of Spain, yet this doesn't erase the significance of the national border (Georgiou, 2006). Furthermore, structures of inequality and power were indeed present, albeit not in an upfront way: rather, these could be read between the lines when the women were discussing vulnerabilities mainly rooted in cultural factors.

## 7.2 Domestication in times of migration, some theoretical implications

As argued above, migration and transnationalism add a layer of complexity to the domestication process. Since the arrival of the internet the world is no longer linear, and neither is the flow of messages nor the private-public interplay. This mobility and these dynamic geographies make it more difficult to perceive what elements participate in the domestication of technology, because the home is no longer a bounded space limited by its own walls. Though this is neither new nor exclusive to the internet, this technology does play a great part by expanding the multiplicity of messages as well as the landscape of where the household is located. Furthermore the nature of the messages can vary from loosely attached to completely detached from this geography. This is clearer when immigrants in a position of vulnerability are subjects of study, as was presented in my research. Theoretically speaking, in this case domestication remained as a framework that provided elements with which to scrutinise such a complex landscape. However, with the help of researchers such as Bakardjieva (2005), Haddon (2004; 2006a), Hynes and Rommes (2006) among others, its earliest components have come a long way in order to be adapted to this new connected environment. As Silverstone (2006) noted, in the beginning domestication was the

product of a moment, aligned towards constructivist approaches, heavily framed by the social and technical progress of a time when the internet and its multiple connections were not yet available. Nonetheless I acknowledge that these core concepts remain useful for analysing newer and more intricate technologies. There are three aspects from my research that can contribute towards the improvement of the theory. I frame this analysis by positioning the internet as the technology in question, but scrutinising it under the light of migration and transnational links. The latter are the components that helped me to get to the core of the internet's cultural appropriation and to assess the complexity of participants' journeys, technological and otherwise. They also touch on the multi-nodality of the household and the dynamism of contexts, and expand on the idea of how the internet can be constructed as a device that challenges the landscape of where it is located.

### *7.2.4 Problematising the concept of users and their technological trajectories*

When starting this project I had in mind a very specific kind of user: I was interested in addressing the journey of domestication of marginalised people. I therefore expected their social, cultural and economic conditions to limit their achievement of it. In this picture, the user was a rather static one and in a permanent state of vulnerability. Another presumption was that the characteristics of migration would only add up to marginalisation and vulnerability. Yet after the fieldwork I realised that none of the women that took part on the study experienced the same kind of vulnerabilities and that their migration experiences, despite precarious conditions, also presented a space for learning and encountering new opportunities. Amid the variety of participants' lives and technological stories, it became clear to me that domestication is a process that mainly depends on aspects that are not entirely related to technology, such as people's social contexts, aims and needs. Therefore it becomes crucial to problematise the users and to deconstruct both their technological understandings and how their lives are compounded, as the process is grounded in a particular context and a particular story. Users, like devices, are not generic and how they interpret technologies can be traced through the particularities of their previous experience (e.g. uses, pressures, expectations and so forth), and the social and contextual elements they have to hand. Haddon and Silverstone (1996) follow this path in the beginning of the theory by closely looking at people's biographies in a study of a young elderly cohort. In the research they acknowledge that the only way to understand how this group evaluates and reacts to ICTs is by looking at aspects of their earlier life as broader and significant social developments. What they are suggesting is that every group of participants, although they may share common characteristics, is different from others with similar socio-demographics. This is due their particular social and cultural circumstances, which help to shape

the way they approach different aspects of life. For example, the young elderly they researched were a group of people that at some point of their lives had experienced the war, which affected, among other things, the way they conducted their finances and their shopping patterns. This is important to highlight because it sheds new light on the element of context, as it becomes a critical piece of information which provides data to spatially locate and to differentiate such groups. Furthermore, in my research it is possible to perceive how being an immigrant at a time when the internet is spreading makes a huge difference between participants, differentiating those that had the opportunity to use it before changing countries, and in a more comfortable environment, from those that encounter it in a new country where language, jobs, surroundings and everything else was also new for them. Though they ended up domesticating the internet in similar ways their paths were rather different, and the only way to asses such a construction – build on confidence or anxiety - is by spending time digging at aspects of immigration and previous life stories, which at first glance seem peripheral to technological appropriation.

Yet this is a dialectic process because also from their technological stories and choices it is possible to explore their daily lives, because internet constructions are not random. On the contrary, they are closely linked to the users' current positioning in the world and their needs, interests and capabilities. Therefore by closely looking at these women's own interpretations of the web and technologies as such, it is also possible to untangle part of their everyday situations, and furthermore, to understand where they are currently located, both digitally and physically. This provides access to a more intimate view formed by their past experiences, expectations, desires and frustrations of all kinds. When assessing technologies as one piece of their everyday life, which changes over time, it becomes crucial to have solid evidence of exactly who is in front of the screen. It also implies leaving aside presumptions in order to fully explore the trajectory of those meanings and how these change over time.

From the complexity of my participants' stories it was possible to perceive that not all vulnerabilities were the same, and that not all of these were permanent. In the midst of the chaos and diversity, I found that a relevant and practical step was to explore their technological paths. I asked these women to talk me through the following: their first encounters with computers, their expectations and their circumstances both before and when acquiring the technology, and the meanings associated with it. This was useful because it shed light on other aspects of the domestication, in the background setting provided by the user. It captured elements that were not immediately obvious by revealing the social background within which domestication was happening. It also identified the roots of their negotiation of meaning, which had started before they acquired the technology and encompassed what they had seen, heard and talked about in relation to technology, as well as their own earlier technological experiences. This was

particularly useful because it provided evidence of how relevant it was to tune their needs to their capabilities, and also to a mixture of social pressures and past experiences that had fermented over time. This was not entirely new as it was another important contribution from Haddon and Silverstone's early domestication study (1996). The authors underline that to understand the present state of a technology it is necessary to look at the wider background of users: "Without an understanding of those realities it is quite impossible to come to terms with the ways in which the potential of information and communication technologies will or will not be realised" (p.160). During their research they spent time looking at a variety of aspects before addressing the domestication of phone and home computers. These aspects included financial constraints, early work environment, social and geographical mobility, household composition and even health issues. They also scrutinised early memories and first experiences with ICTs, touching on a diversity of elements from the physical, social and psychological spectrum. This was done with the certainty that the significance of technological developments on people's lives lies beyond their availability. Although they explain the importance of such aspects in domestication studies, they do not address them as a separate concept, which would have been extremely useful as a way to operationalise this theory in the fieldwork. It would have helped to address something that could easily be ignored, which is that domestication starts long before a device is acquired, and that this beginning is not limited to production and marketing aspects.

In my research I refer to this by looking at the concept of technological trajectories, to deliberately address the paths of different ICTs in a person's life, and how this might pave the way - or not - for the domestication of new devices. Furthermore, I look at aspects that are associated with this technology but start before purchase, such as discourses and expectations. Particularly with technologies as widespread as the internet, people are aware of their existence before they access them; it is part of their conversations, negotiations, even requirements for jobs. Therefore the symbolical value of being part of a technology is indeed present in the strategies and practices of use. It also shapes the affordances perceived. Thus it is appropriate to take these into account when researching the role of technology in everyday lives, always remembering that this place will eventually change, just as everyday lives change. It is a constant, never-ending process, not only because there are new technologies emerging that will be incorporated, but also because those everyday lives are themselves not static; all those previous experiences are part of the journey and hold part of the answer to the why and the how of providing meaning.

In this research I was able to differentiate two main groups of women according to their technological path: (a) those who were domesticating the internet in a context of migrations; and (b) those who were redomesticating it. Because migration is such a life-changing

experience, it influences the entire context of how the internet was appropriated for the first time. It may be the trigger for starting to use it due to language, emotional need, pressures to acquire English, to make a living in an expensive country, among other things. Migration also may be change that presents opportunities such as time, availability, internet classes, etc. These elements are addressed by this concept, and show the clash between what users want and what they can actually do with the device, which shapes their experience, but does not necessarily change their discourses about it.

The nuances of these elements are rooted in the users' experience, but went beyond the boundaries of the household and took participants back in time, whether to their hometowns or to other situations where technologies were a subject, a pressure, something that in some cases embarrassed them and in others made them proud. These are key to understanding the meaning they gave to the technology as born from a handful of experiences that were not technological but that influenced the circumstances and variations of their processes. Although their meanings and practices might change over time, there was one decisive moment when they had started to incorporate this technology into their lives. This could have been a gradual and long-term process or a critical one in which they constructed a first practice that might later change according to the context. This first time was at the heart of the domestication as first meanings started to take a concrete form. Then, in accordance with the change of context, practices and meanings would also change, because the technology is in constant construction and constant dialogue with the scenario in which it is introduced.

### *7.2.5 Redomestication in action*

Domestication relies on the environment and the affordances that arise from a specific context where it cohabits with other devices and meanings. These are interwoven into a moral economy, giving life to the specific role that technology will play in this situation. Therefore, both the place where the process of domestication happens and what is involved are rich sources of information about the why and the how of the process. In the same way, when context changes affordances may also change. For example, the internet is domesticated in circumstances that are needed for a particular job, which could be complemented by leisure activities. It becomes part of everyday life in the household and in the workplace. With practice comes confidence, skills are built, and the process unfolds towards complete domestication. Then the same user is placed in a different society, a different home, with different devices, a different job and different needs. Does the technology remain the same? Does this change erase the domestication? Do the affordances once perceived now change?

These are relevant questions for domestication amid the worldwide spread of migration flows and interconnected people. With this research I have found that the challenge is to address these differences without erasing the beginning of the process and the meanings already given. From my experience with Latinas in London this can be theoretically and empirically tackled by revisiting and further developing the concept of redomestication. This is rooted in the core of domestication as it recognises that meanings and practices are constantly changing, and when first mentioned as a concept, by its own merits acknowledged different needs, routines and/or persons involved (Lie and Sorensen, 1996). This is a reminder of the dynamic nature of domestication, a never-ending process where changes in the environment leave a mark on how devices are appropriated. This is the reason why scholars have looked at the role of phones and computers in new contexts (Haddon, 2004). However, this has not yet been done with the internet, nor in cases such as migration when there are several changes at once, touching simultaneously on social, cultural and economic aspects of individuals' lives, as I encountered during this project. Therefore one of my contributions to the concept is to go one step further to operationalise it, which will enable future research on the matter to address technologies' role under new – and sometimes more challenging – circumstances. In order to do this it is important to recognise and highlight the complexity as well as the particularities of each case. For example, some of the women I encountered during fieldwork had already made sense of the internet, and this meaning did not disappear completely but 'travelled' with them as they changed countries. Participants looked to the internet for a continuity of practices that provided them with ontological security. Yet under these new circumstances, previously unforeseen opportunities in technology arose, providing new meanings. Therefore the concept of redomestication does not imply a new start for the process: on the contrary, in concordance with what other scholars have already highlighted, technological experiences shape the way new devices are encountered as well as how old devices are encountered under new circumstances (Bakardjieva, 2005; Haddon, 2004; Haddon and Silverstone, 1996). My addition is to establish that to understand how this unfolds it is necessary to go beyond their technical trajectories and to look at their life trajectories as well. This will enable researchers to size, as a first step, the variety of changes and challenges faced by people, as well as previous living conditions that have had an impact on how technologies were first appropriated. Only when understanding how they position themselves in these different aspects of their lives, and addressing the multilayer aspects and complexity of their situations, is it possible to assess changes in technology adoption and use.

Furthermore with this research I was also able to grasp empirically the redomestication concept, particularly as applied to a migrant population. In my experience redomestication became

clearer when there was a change in social positions. For example, some of my participants became part of a vulnerable cohort after migration and experienced for the first time how it is to live in a deprived environment. Interestingly, it was due to this new position and context that the internet was evaluated in a new light, and gained the status of a valuable resource for maintaining ties and for communicating, but more importantly, as a way of maintaining their old habits. Through redomestication the internet acquired a new meaning, which might or might not be related to the one previously attached. Yet inevitably new significances also arose, for example there were services that had not needed before – maps, translation sites, affordances of the web that were newly perceived or required. From the findings I could also perceive how important their previous technological experiences and achievements were for their redomestication, as these were a source of confidence and thus the practices provided them with security in times of uncertainty and disadvantage. Overall the empirical findings allow me to characterise redomestication as a process of re-accommodation of new needs, and to note that, despite the changes in their everyday lives, domestication does not start again from the beginning. However the changes experienced did indeed change the affordances of the device and offered users novel possibilities. This can also be perceived in the domestication stages as almost every one brought changes: commodification, location and form of access presented differences, and perhaps even value, depending on the new situation. There was also a change of strategies: the where, how and who. These remained valuable elements that fed the redomestication process by acknowledging users' stories in terms of both life and technological experiences.

### *7.2.6 Digital vs. physical positioning*

Immigration can be described as a changing process, where adaptation on many levels is in order. This dynamism of the process is mirrored in changes to the technological consumption process. It is also reflected in the multi-nodality of the transnational home, where users use the internet, among other devices, to link the public with the private. However, what portion of that public they connect with has to be looked at more closely. As has been argued, these migrant women expressed a considerable level of detachment from the culture where they were inserted. This was one of the reasons why they turned to the internet, to communicate with and access media from their home country and/or from the Latino region. By choosing to negotiate messages and discourses mainly from their place of belonging, effectively the participants were digitally positioning their households in a different landscape from where it was physically located. This is agreement with Georgiou's (2013) argument of how digital networks and communication alter the sense of locality, and furthermore how spaces of belonging are no longer bounded to geographical places. Although in this research participants did not shut out

all the messages from the ‘immediate’ environment outside their homes, through the use of the web they were able to enhance their ties with one place by giving it preference.

They were on a path to a greater level of connection with their roots, through communicating with their families and friends, and also through accessing cultural products. Although the web could also connect them to other topics of interest, not necessarily related to their cultural backgrounds, the core experience of the internet as a space of escape from London was galvanised. This demonstrated how technology can connect and disconnect at the same time, and moreover, how the location of the home, in a transnational terrain, can be moved to a different place that people feel more connected with. Likewise it can transport them, feeding their transnational experiences and enhancing their closeness regardless of distance. As a consequence the culturally constructed meanings of technology are fuelled. The internet then becomes a place almost as tangible as a country of residence, where participants performed activities, improved their self-esteem, faced apprehensions, pursued interests and became connected. It also represents an interesting empirical example of what Bailey (2007) has called spaces of inclusion and segregation, because it connects while disconnecting at the same time.

Yet I must stress that the agency of choosing messages to be negotiated can only go that far. As discussed, despite their claims participants were not completely separated from British society. They had jobs, they took transportation, and they encountered other people, although they were not completely able or confident to communicate with them. They were also interested in, or at least curious about, aspects of this culture and some of their products too. Picking up the free newspaper at the tube or retrieving it from the garbage in the office they were cleaning are indications of that. They might not have used their online resources to look up the X Factor winner yet some of them knew about it. This is a reminder that the internet may have been their main point of connection with the outside, but not the only one. And also that there is a great diversity of womens' experiences with the internet, varying from those having only computers with internet at home, others a television set and a computer without internet and others without any of those but connecting from a community centre. Yet they all referred to the internet as a very relevant source.

Again the black and white compartments do not do justice to the hybridity of these women’s cultures and how their lives are filled with messages from different sources. Nonetheless it is possible to argue that their intentions indicate a reconnection with their cultural attachments. The internet, then, offers a household many possibilities and connections. Perhaps the main one, for these women, is connecting with aspects of Latin America. Others include connecting with the host society by retrieving information to help them with the practicalities of their daily lives

or to pursue interests related to British culture. It is because of this hybridity that they can decide where to position their homes, digitally speaking, and which possibilities and connections to pursue.

## 7.3 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the empirical and theoretical implications of the thesis. I started by summarising who the Latinas were who took part in the study, in terms of their everyday lives but also their diverse stories with technologies. Then I addressed the different meanings associated with the internet, such as a window to connect with their home countries, tightly linked to their cultural identities. It was also a window from where they could access London, mainly for practical purposes and to access to information that otherwise was too difficult to obtain due their English literacy problems. In a context coloured by vulnerabilities, their internet practices were perceived as something positive in their migration experiences. This could be either because they had the opportunity to encounter it for the first time while abroad, and it was a much longed-for and needed step; or because it was already part of their repertoire and thus using it gave them comfort and security. Their transnational links and sociocultural affordances also contributed to how the internet was shaped. They were in constant communication with their families and through the use of the technology they could support relationships with those back in their country. Cultural lenses were also present on their consumption choices, feeding their moral economies and also inviting them to perceive the internet as a changeable medium that could mimic television and radio in how the content was presented and the nature of it.

From a theoretical standpoint, despite the development of new devices and the rise of complex scenarios, domestication has remained as a well-defined approach that attempts to explain technology as a culturally constructed meaning. The dynamism of both the development of technologies and the migrant movement invites us to come back to some of its central elements and to discuss how these can be interpreted in the light of these new situations and particular findings. Overall there were three key elements of the process that stood out. (a) The technological journey of users, which combined their experiences with other technologies and their discourses and expectations. This had an effect on how they domesticated the internet and how they perceived technology. (b) The device itself, its location, how it could be accessed and handled, and what kind of content they negotiated from it. (c) Finally, there is the social environment where this happens, be this a specific place at home, in a community centre, or in isolation in a strange country. Together these add up to complete the process. However, not all these elements are specifically addressed by the theory and deserve further attention, both

theoretically and empirically. One of these is the aspect of cultural understandings, which are rooted in people's places of belonging, and impact on how they have socialised the technology, how it is perceived, and for what purpose. These are delineated by cultural lenses and become evident when they are immersed in a strange society and make use of the technology as a way of maintaining their ties and connecting. The cultural attachments and identity are then part of the code of how the internet is shaped. Therefore affordances and meaning-making are coloured by the way they perceive and understand the world, by their communications with others, and of course by the technology. This is not something that *per se* converts, for example, all users from one culture into the same kind of users because their particularities are also at the core of their understandings. Still there is a pattern to be stressed. This pattern becomes clear by adding the migration component. Things that may appear peripheral or of no technological concern, for example the importance of image and the role of the mother, are tightly intertwined with cultural aspects, which later interplay in how specific properties of the device are perceived. In other words, domestication and cultural understandings are linked, in the same way that the social context is key to assessing the affordances perceived and ultimately the role of technology, as well as its meaning in this context.

The line of argument touches on how important it is to know the person that is in front of the screen. It is the user that holds the answers to the why and the how of a technology. Through its socialisations, values, and strategies domestication has tackled the umbrella of the moral economy. It is this moral economy that is implicit in the story of these and other devices. Yet it needs to be explicit, as do the specificities of first experiences and contexts of appropriations. When addressing domestication, due to the diversity of life stories and backgrounds of these women, a useful concept was that of technological trajectories. This concept describes the different points of departure and appropriations through time, embracing the dynamics and changes of their daily lives. I also stressed how relevant the concept of redomestication is in a context of migration and mobility. It has been loosely defined, but nonetheless its richness becomes evident once the user experiences a dramatic change of context, such as migration. This also shows how affordances change according to where technologies are appropriated and how a change of circumstances affects how these are perceived. Redomestication is also linked to the symbolic environment of appropriation, and the idea that despite these changes users could continue with rituals and practices that brought them a sense of comfort and security.

Finally, through the internet people can, to a certain extent, select the kind of messages they negotiate. This, in combination with other non-technical factors such as isolation and sociocultural elements, could position the house in a different landscape. Though geographically they remain in London, digitally they could be closer to Latin America. It is not

possible to argue that all the messages they would negotiate and their moral economy would be completely Latino, yet the cultural tone of their interactions is highlighted.

# CHAPTER VIII

## Latinas' internet, an epilogue

The explorative and ethnographic nature of this research project was leaded by the premise that more important than having all the answers is to ask the right questions. And to enquire how technologies are domesticated in different, sometimes challenging, situations is also relevant. It asks as much about people and their realities as about how technological developments are part of those. It is also an invitation to investigate social issues in times when technologies are a social construction that is very much taken for granted. Who is in front of the screen and what it means to people can be easily overlooked, particularly when the subject is migrant women, part of a minority. This was my inspiration to give voice in this thesis to women like Fabiola, and to reflect on her excitement of looking for family pictures in Facebook, or the different emotions she expressed when online, and how from her perspective the web is a place to learn about almost everything. It was the richness of her journey, and those of the other 38 women that took part in the research, that led me to ask how internet meanings were born and performed in the midst of migration.

The aims of the theoretical contribution were to bring together notions of internet appropriation in everyday life with those of the transnational literature and migration. I tackled aspects of digital inclusion and how disadvantaged populations appropriate technologies. Yet in my approach I aimed for a cultural standpoint, highlighting the relevance of their condition as migrants with transnational links, and therefore why it is relevant to combine that literature with that of media and cultural studies. From the standpoint of domestication, the culture of the household - as well as the routines of the everyday - are the context in which artefacts acquire meaning and are domesticated, becoming familiar, but also triggering change (Silverstone and Haddon, 1996). The theory relies on key concepts such as moral economy, stages of domestication, and articulations. These served as a guide for starting to dissect their internet meanings which were attached to practicalities of their everyday lives and cultural understandings. Yet when a migrant population is in focus, the privacy of the home is invaded by transnational links, inviting us to research domestication under a new light.

I started with core concepts of domestication, such as looking at the dynamics and elements of their moral economy, followed by the stages of how meanings arose and how they were linked

to practices and strategies. I also drew on double and triple articulations, focusing on the devices and the symbolic context of appropriation in order to pursue how their meanings related to social understandings. Still it was a complex landscape. These were women labelled as "invisible", with limited social networks and without knowledge of the English language. Their consumption of media was very much influenced by their cultural attachments, positioning them in between cultures. Their transnational links were a reflection of that. They also had dissimilar technological trajectories. This variety enriched the data but posed an extra challenge when trying to track both the social and the technological streams of how and why they arrive at their internet constructions. These characteristics also added to the particularities of users, which it was necessary to consider to go beyond the generalisations of labels such as "migrant" or "vulnerable". This helped me to address, rather than make assumptions about, their online practices and experiences.

## 9.1 The internet as a window and a mirror: overview of the empirical findings

The evidence led me to claim that the internet for Latinas in vulnerable conditions in London was indeed constructed as a response to their stories and social locations (Nelson et al 2001). Latinas involved in this project maintained – or attempted to maintain – close relationships with family at home. These findings concur with arguments regarding the relevance of new technologies to strengthen migrants' social networks in a virtual landscape, such as those revealed by Vertovec (2009) and Diminescu (2008). Fostering family relationships challenged by distance was also an issue, as well as how new technologies offered concrete meanings to achieve it (Madianou and Miller, 2012). Video-calls and chat were among the most valuable due to the richness of the media and how people could see each other and talk, or write, at the same time. Social network applications, such as Facebook, were also among their favourites because they could exchange pictures and remain connected, increasing the continuity of their exchanges (Madianou and Miller, 2012; Vertovec, 2009). This is perhaps a representation of the culture of bonds argued by Diminescu (2008) that was very much present due to their ties and relied heavily on virtual practices, nonetheless with nuances and different degrees of involvement.

In this case those relationships were in part a response to lacking networks in the city of residence, as these women felt very isolated. Despite some of them socialising with fellow migrants at Latino community centre, those relationships were bounded to the place, or to the particular class, and not taken further. My interpretation is that their hectic work schedules, in combination with great geographical distances in the city (and the cost of transport) contributed to their limited numbers of friends. They also reported the relevance of Latino ties, thus chain

migration was indeed present (McIlwaine, 2007; 2011). Their links included acquaintances who invited them to London in an attempt to help each other; people who received them in their houses; others that helped them to find a manual job; and even neighbours who lent them devices for accessing the internet. Therefore theirs is a mixed experience of being part of this scattered community yet isolated from the mainstream society.

Likewise it has been argued that new technologies help migrants to reinforce previous practices (Vertovec, 2009). Through their second and third articulations of ICTs these people could reach ontological security (Hartmann, 2006). For sophisticated users the continuity of practices was a source of comfort as they could carry on with activities they found satisfying despite the multiple changes in their environment. For those who were starting their domestication path, the internet was also a means of being transported to their home country or having company, achieving an intimate connectedness (Wilding, 2006). This highlights the importance of looking at the symbolic context of the appropriation (Courtois et al 2011; Hartmann, 2006) as the why and the how of internet use are also tuned to emotional needs triggered by migration conditions and socioeconomic disadvantages. Equally this touches on spaces of belonging and digital location going beyond geographical limits (Bailey et al 2007; Georgiou, 2006; Morley, 2006).

As other research has found, language was a key element of their migration experiences (Burck, 2011; Portes et al 1999; Kohen and Rosenau, 2002), particularly for Latin-Americans in London (McIlwayne et al 2011). Actually one of the most consistent findings is that all participants reported problems with English literacy, despite the variety of their backgrounds and time in the city. This had a domino effect on jobs, social networks and media consumption. Therefore these women tend to negotiated messages and consumed media mainly from their home countries and those with similar cultural attachments. They accessed content that was in their language and also aligned to their interests. It was more than a practical decision, because homesickness and being in touch with their roots were also important (Hiller and Franz, 2004). Nonetheless, as a consequence their moral economies were mainly fed by this sense of being Latino, which took over conversations, interests and consumption practices, positioning their households - digitally - in a different landscape. This is evidence of the translocality of the household that goes beyond geographical boundaries (Georgiou, 2013).

These are spaces of belonging and isolation at the same time (Bailey, 2007). Through online practices these women somehow coped with marginalisation yet also increased it. For example, by consuming media content in Spanish they did indeed reconnect with their roots, but also went further from the mainstream: as a product of their moral economies they created a “Latino island”, in the centres and perhaps in their households. Then, when arguing the power of

technological connection, it is very relevant to ask to what were they connected, and what were the consequences of their choices? In this case the internet was positioned as a tool to help these women to cope with their vulnerabilities, but also somehow resulted in them being further excluded from society. This is a complex and blurred terrain where it is not possible to be categorical about their connections. As Burell and Anderson (2008) point out, it would be too narrow to classify them in a binary perspective, i.e. with either the host society or their home countries, as the internet can be constructed as a multitude of connections. This became apparent when assessing my participants' online practices. One example was how interested some of them were in watching US forensic TV shows in England translated into Spanish, and qualified as a source of both entertainment and learning.

Aspects of their internet practices were also a reflection of their roles as women. According to migration scholars, gender roles are part of the cultural constructions that help us dive into their roots and understandings (Pavlenko, 2001; Lutz 2010, 2011; Vertovec, 2009). Gender roles are also highly influential in these womens' migration experiences (Phoenix, 2008, in Giralt and Bailey, 2010) and can be viewed as a number of layers. The first relates to their motivations for moving to London and how their roles included being carers, such as to take care of someone such as husband or a niece, or to keep a daughter company. Another role was that of provider: some women that signed onto a migration adventure with the expectation of a better economic future for their families. In a different stream, their gender characteristics were apparent in how they accessed and used the internet. As previously discussed, the literature has indicated how women are in general disadvantaged in this area (see for example Leung, 2009) and this was also the case here. For example, husbands or children limited their access by restricting the times they would make it available to them. Family comments regarding their inexperience fuelled their lack of confidence. Yet there were contradictory findings as the family provided key support in some cases, for example by providing technologies or setting up online accounts. Both aspects also highlight the importance of social networks and support, particularly the role of family members and warm experts (Bakardjieva, 2005; DiMaggio and Hargittai, 2001).

Their vulnerabilities made the internet more relevant to their daily lives. Distant family, familiar media content, information that otherwise was difficult to access among others (Khvorostianov et al 2012; Chen, 2010) fed the affordances perceived and their constructions. It was not possible to generalise about the extent of these uses because not all participants had the same experience with technologies and therefore engaged at different levels (Helsper, 2010, 2011, 2012). This is in part because education, understood as a lack of economic and knowledge resources, had a bearing on their processes (Ryce and Haythornwaite, 2006). I therefore differentiated between participants according to their educational background and technological

experience, which provided a much clearer picture of how they embrace the internet. For some it was almost taken for granted; others starting to domesticate it had long been awaited and desired. This had implications on the different stages of domestication the participants presented, starting with how they took possession of the technology and its physical disposition (Silverstone et al., 1992); some accessed it at home and others exclusively in community centres. Yet this is also problematic due to the mobility of the device and how difficult it is to grasp the internet as a non-material technology, making it difficult to grasp its second articulation (Hartmann, 2006). Strategies of use that are in direct dialogue with its incorporation (Silverstone, 2006) also differed depending on the role taken by their family members and, most importantly, on these women's technological confidence based on previous experiences. Therefore it was in the final stage of domestication, conversion – when symbolical meaning is achieved (Hynes and Rommes, 2006; Silverstone et al., 1992) – where more differences arose. It is not clear that all participants had reached this point.

These differences had implications for their self-assurance but not necessarily for the activities pursued, as communication and cultural consumption remained a distinct interest. Therefore the question is how in a context of vulnerability, particularly marked by drastic socioeconomic conditions, the internet was appropriated. To answer this I will highlight something that many of them referred to: London was, above all, a city of opportunities. Despite the disadvantages they experienced, the city was, among other things, a place for them to start over, a new adventure full of hopes and goals. Technologies and internet access were part of those. They had further possibilities to access the internet, for example by attending classes at community centres and/or libraries with free Wi-Fi. Recycled laptops, computers and Ipods ended up in hands of some of those women. Furthermore, others accessed the internet thanks to neighbours with unprotected wireless connections, or who directly lent them access. Still not all of them depended on someone else to have regular access. For example some women acquired laptops for their children, and some women were given them by their children. Overall there were again a diversity of ways of getting connected, and in that regard financial considerations were present but not necessarily an issue.

Overall the internet was a window for them to overcome loneliness, distance from family and friends, limited social networks, lack of English, and cultural detachment. It also reflected their aims beyond technology, as they conceived the internet as an essential driver for progress and success in life, both professionally and personally. This reflected the aspirational aspect of their relationship with the internet, as they spoke of feeling more knowledgeable and empowered when using it. They also used it as a tool for navigating a host culture from which they were detached, and for finding and translating information about the city where they now lived,

although the internet is not a sustainable answer to all their struggles rooted in more profound disadvantages. In this context what fuelled their digital appropriations was the opportunity to go beyond their own marginalisation, by connecting with a physically distant but culturally close place; by continuing their consumption practices and rituals; and/or by believing that the use of the internet was synonymous with progress and a key step towards achieving learning goals. Those meanings were born of the particularities of their context and linked to their local conceptions (Anderson and Tracey 2001; Leung, 2005; Miller and Slater, 200; Hine, 2000).

Although their levels of digital engagement and degrees of technological expertise were dissimilar, the internet was present in all their discourses and had an important role in the migrant situation of all of them, either by enabling them to continue their consumption practices and communications, and/or by empowering them to be part of this technological stream for the first time. These are some of the non-material gains that fuelled their online participation. Therefore the properties these women perceived in the internet, as a form of communication, entertainment, and/or learning device among others, were strongly connected with their current needs and interests as immigrants in a marginalisation stream. These affordances, then, spoke of their interest in learning and also in staying connected through maintaining long-distance relationships and cultural consumption. Their connections were further reinforced because they were negotiating messages articulated in their home countries.

Finally, to contest aspects of the computer beyond its materiality and symbolic meaning and to focus on the internet itself is a challenge to both methodology and theory. In my experience, from a domestication approach, it became almost impossible to study the internet by itself without addressing other aspects associated with technological experiences, such as the discourses, expectations and frustrations that inevitably complement experiences with access devices and the power structures that surround them. Furthermore, it became clear to me that aspects of culture and of personal trajectories would enrich the discussion. Redomestication and what happens when the moral economy of the household changes, and the transnationalisation of the family, are aspects that are not directly addressed by this theory, but are nonetheless crucial factors to be assessed when migrants' internet meanings and practices are the focus. Hence, however rich the foundations of domestication and the conceptualisation of its stages, these aspects remain missing.

## 9.2 Domestication theory and migration: the beginning of a new chapter?

> *Domestication is practice. It involves human agency. It requires effort and culture, and it leaves nothing as it is. Perhaps therein lay an early error in its formulation: the impression that somehow only the technology was transformed on its appropriation into the household. (Silverstone, 2006, pp. 231-232)*

By challenging domestication and applying it to users who are part of a transnational arena, I aimed to explore which concepts and logics of this approach were useful for deconstructing the role of technologies in the life of migrant women. This meant dissecting the material, symbolic and social streams of the internet in order to examine the affordances that the women in my research perceived in technology, and moreover, to what extent these were supported and/or constrained by their condition as vulnerable foreigners. Overall, the question that guided this thesis was how technologies gained a place and a meaning by being appropriated in a transnational home, and how this influenced women's everyday lives. Therefore perceptions and appropriations needed to be scrutinized by taking into account the nuances of their context. Domestication provides an account of the context within which the internet becomes relevant in the lives of these women. It acknowledges how devices have to make sense in order to be domesticated, and addresses the aspects of this process that go beyond technology, providing an enriched view of the cultural elements presented in the process. However, the theory does not directly address tensions between the household and the outside world, and by extension public messages. This leaves the interpretation of the theory in shadow when the population includes migrants in a transnational context. Hence, given the experiences of these women and the changes in their lives and contexts, it is relevant to address those in order to position the internet in their realities. In this case the domestication metaphors of "outside the front door" and "becoming part of the furniture" acquired a new colour in times of high mobility and extended digital communication. Domestication is forced to be in constant dialogue with migration and transnationalism due to homes having new and extended boundaries. Consequently, the location-based approach needs to be moved forward to incorporate aspects such as cultural lenses for appropriation and for the transnationality of the everyday. Moreover in addressing the technological trajectories of participants it also became evident that "the everyday" is not entirely stable (Lie and Sørensen, 1996). Its changes must be addressed because they are in constant interaction with moral economy and the messages that are negotiated. This is essential if technology is to be incorporated in the household and in the everyday (Silverstone et al., 1992). The quest to know how this device gains meaning and how it is culturally constructed cannot, then, pass these observations without further reflection and account should be taken of these issues in the analysis.

One of my intentions was to explain how technologies gain or regain meaning after a migration process touching on objects, meanings and practices. From my perspective, the main gap in understanding migrants' domestication of technologies was the scant attention paid to both their cultural appropriation and the nuances of their hybrid context. This was pivotal in the creation of cultural meanings, and of the context within which the technologies were first appropriated. Ties expressed in the level and intensity of their communications, connections and cultural consumption were to some extent the result of this, providing the internet with meaning while they remained mostly detached/marginalised in a foreign society. With this thesis I attempted to show the value of considering context and affordances as key aspects in the identification of particularities when assessing a new scenario. The internet does not acquire the same meaning in all situations, and in migrant populations affordances are shaped by the transnationality of their everyday lives, as well as by the vulnerabilities and advantages encountered in the host society. This is also linked to the concept of redomestication, which can be used to address changes of scenario without erasing what has been constructed. Meanings are not static: they are continually changing and "travel" with users. This is why meanings of devices are constructed even before they are acquired, and also why changes in circumstances do not means that a device loses its meaning entirely. On the contrary, it is reshaped on the basis of new needs without losing its boundaries. This aspect also reinforces the reading of technologies through particular cultural lenses, since cultural codes play a part in shaping technological discourses and expectations, as well as practices. The trajectories and technological departures of the user help to clarify these issues. Users are not static, they develop over time; similarly "the everyday" is dynamic, and it is relevant to acknowledge their trajectories. Moreover, some widespread technologies, such as the internet, start to be domesticated before they are purchased through socialisation and expectations; there is a negotiation of its meanings based on discourses and other people's experiences, or seeing the technology, that deserves more careful consideration.

The richness of participants' diversity in terms of their life stories and technological experiences afforded some difficulty, but also a great opportunity to reflect on the considerable range of layers of vulnerability encountered, and furthermore, on the different points of departure and how being disadvantaged in a particular context is not necessarily mean permanent. The data indicated that there is no single type of standardised migrant; no single pattern of the kind and extent of vulnerabilities encountered. These vulnerabilities and challenges were of great variety and touched on different and extremely challenging aspects, not limited to their everyday lives. The concepts of marginalisation and vulnerability can be presented as general categories, but in reality they are manifested in a range of aspects from jobs and housing to self-esteem and opportunities. Perhaps the most unexpected finding was participants' struggles with English, the

profound impact of these and how language affects so many facets of a person's life. Language was also linked to internet practices – a fact usually taken for granted when discussing internet appropriation among vulnerable and migrant populations. When researching these cohorts, then, it is important to spend time on areas that may not at first appear particularly relevant or interesting, but that are of great importance when addressing everyday experiences. Yet despite these differences, at the moment of the research the participants were in a relatively similar place, both literally and metaphorically. Therefore their internet was being constructed in quite a similar way. The differences were provided by the nuances of their technological experience and of their support network, touching on their symbolical contexts of domestication. Helsper's (2009, 2010) proposal of corresponding fields is a response to that which acknowledges the resources people have on hand to negotiate meanings, and from which practices arise. People make use of the resources they have on hand. Thus with this research I have followed the guidelines set by previous researchers regarding the importance of focusing on contexts, social networks, resources and motivations (Helsper, 2011; Mehra and Merkel, 2004). Furthermore, although it was not the main aim of this thesis, it was apparent from the data that emotional attachment to the act of consumption, not just the content, had an impact on the importance of the technology. This concurs with what Hartmann (2006) wrote about the importance of the third articulation. Courtois et al (2011) proposed perhaps the first empirical attempt to study this as a unit, and my findings reinforce the importance of continuing along this path.

During the research process, certain theoretical concepts helped me to deal with these intricacies as well as the tensions encountered. One was the value of accounting for their technological journey as the beginning of their relationship with a specific technology by addressing the context and affordances perceived in a particular scenario. The concept was useful in research on women currently in similar scenarios, but with different backgrounds and technological experiences, which influenced their approaches to the internet. If the present reality of these women is considered in isolation, meanings and expectations may strike one as similar. There is a convergence of meanings and uses among Latinas due to their current socio-cultural contexts which led participants to perceive similar affordances in the internet, and therefore their constructions were alike despite their different life experiences. Nevertheless, focusing only on the present would risk ignoring the complexities and differentiations of these women when facing the technology; although their interest in their immigrant situations was rather similar, their journeys to get there were not.

My findings led me to some key theoretical premises. First, that user should be problematized (Merha and Merkel, 2004) as there are no standardised migrant experiences, nor standardised technological uses. Hynes and Rommes (2006) were perhaps the first to point out how

domestication to some extent ignores user diversity. They consider gender, ethnicity, and educational background, but diversity should be addressed beyond these categorisations, in terms of experiences. I would therefore add the technological trajectory of users, their points of departure, their previous stories with technology, their expectations before purchasing, and the meanings negotiated. Furthermore it is valuable to reflect not just on how they use the internet every day, but to look on how they interpret the possibilities and what they take from that. Through domestication I was also able to trace how the internet acquired meaning by specifically assessing it as a device from which affordances could be perceived (Hutchby, 2001). In this regard cultural appropriation and the role of their transnational links were significant. I also learnt that the internet's meaning in their day-to-day lives is part of a continuum. Therefore to explore it researchers should also consider users' past experiences and technological points of departure, such as - in this case - those prior to moving to London, either in previous migration experiences or in their home countries. Notwithstanding that there is not just one aspect of their lives which is responsible for how they construct their internet, their migrations status and vulnerabilities enriched the approach by contributing to depicting their everyday, social and cultural context. Additionally it is necessary to examine their cultural attachment and identity. This is dynamic and plural, based on antagonisms and differences that encompass people's belonging, experiences and roles. By looking at the particularity of their cultural interpretations I am also addressing the fact that different migrant groups, at different stages of their migration process, may present different needs. We must therefore avoid generalisations, and instead look more closely at their practices and interpret these according to their particular situations. This is part of their cultural identity and the cultural understandings and codes that are needed in order to assess the detailed distinctions between individuals from specific communities and their use of technologies (Bird and Jorgenson, 2002; Georgiou, 2005; Leung, 2005). It then becomes clear that the relationship of these users with the internet is not unidirectional, whilst at the same time their online practices also forge their experiences as migrants. This is in concordance with the last words published by Silverstone (2006) on domestication theory, that "it leaves nothing as it is" (p.231).

## 9.3 Limitations of the study and alternative approaches to the same story

Several methodological and practical limitations were encountered in this project. The first concerns its replicability, since the questions posed for this thesis could be applied to migrants from other countries and in different contexts of vulnerability, without necessarily finding the same answers. Therefore, although this study could be reproduced, its results cannot be generalised to all Latinos in London, all immigrants in the UK, or migrants everywhere, even

though there will be similarities regarding their spaces of belonging and different levels of disconnection from the mainstream. Another difficulty in replicating the study would be the moment, meaning literally the period of time when the study was carried out, when the internet was widely but not universally available. The adult population starting to domesticate the internet for the first time would be expected to decrease. Furthermore, among participants there were individuals from a non-digital generation that grew up without knowing the internet, for whom exposure was limited and perceived as rare and as a luxury. This particular situation influenced their perceptions and discourses.

A further methodological limitation is related to ethnography: specifically, participant observation. Although I had some opportunity to experience part of their everyday lives and to observe some of their vulnerabilities, this was not as extensive as it could have been. It also restricted a more profound analysis of content, and therefore the second articulation of the internet. My limits were set by the intimacy required in order to truly research domestication at home. This is also why I combined participant observation with in-depth interviews. In trying to follow the core of domestication I realised how difficult it was to do this inside a house, particularly with mobile devices. For example, there were times and places of use that were beyond the possibility of the keenest researcher; for example, some participants accessed the internet in the intimacy of bed before going to sleep. In this research I had the added complication of people living in overcrowded conditions, where inevitably more people would be unintentionally involved. This panorama forced me to change methodological tactics. Although participant observation had been my first aim in terms of addressing their everyday lives, I later found other - although less direct - ways of tackling this. To gain their trust in the interviews and have the opportunity of observing these women in at home or on the course was an alternative and useful approach. Assessing the domestication of technologies by vulnerable people in situations such as those of poverty, isolation, marginalisation, or working at odd hours, is indeed very difficult.

However, what I was able to grasp was their day-to-day reality: aspects of their vulnerability that were not immediately apparent, but came out in ordinary conversations with me or amongst themselves. To be able to visit some of their homes and observe how and where they interacted with the computer and the internet was of great value. Although I do not regret opting to address as many as 37 women in different situations and therefore spend less time with each, I consider that for a single researcher to pursue participant observation in greater depth, this number should be cut, and the time spent on fieldwork (excluding recruitment) should be increased. Furthermore in my experience, even though I shared the cultural codes and the language of participants, it was very difficult to obtain access to the population and especially to the

intimacy of their homes. Thus to be considered invisible or as an equal, rather than a guest, other measures would be needed. Personal commitments prevented me from taking a more extreme approach, but had these not existed I think that "going native", living or working with these women, would have proved useful[41].

From a theoretical standpoint I am positive that domestication was a suitable approach for researching the place that technology held in the lives of these women. Migration and transnationalism studies also contributed a series of concepts and theorisations that enabled me to make sense of the experiences and vulnerabilities encountered. However, this thesis could also have been conceived from an identity-driven perspective. Identity is not fixed; on the contrary it is dynamic and plural, based on antagonisms and differences that encompass people's belonging, experiences and roles (see Hall, 1990, 1992; Georgiou 2006) . The concept sheds light on the traces left by events such as immigration, helping to explore how internet appropriation and engagement come about. For example, when appropriating the internet participants were also constantly negotiating who they were - and who they were becoming - in light of the new challenges and possibilities they found in London. Thus the study of their stories of appropriation and interpretation provides a basis for addressing the dynamics of the negotiation of their identity as immigrants in a vulnerable context. It would therefore be interesting to analyse how Latinas in a context of change and vulnerability interpret these possibilities and use them as a space for performing their identity. This angle would also highlight the role of context in the internet appropriation process, the negotiation of identity and the interplay between the two.

Another approach could be that of a macro perspective on the internet in society, looking at the broad picture of where technologies are developed and the power structures of societies (Lie and Sorensen, 1996; Pinch, Bijker and Hughes, 1987; Kline and Pinch, 1999). Social Construction of Technologies is a theory that focuses on the moment when technologies are designed and developed, enriching the picture of why and how they acquire different meanings and uses (Kline and Pinch, 1999; Winner, 1993). Research from this viewpoint could explore further how the internet, as a social construction, is embedded in a structure and open to interpretation by different groups in accordance with their differing contexts (Winner, 1993). Yet the main focus would be on the beginning of the process when technologies, or for example applications, are designed.

[41] Good representations of this full immersion approach include the work done by Malinowski (2002) and Wallraff (1985).

Finally, this thesis represents a snapshot of a particular moment in the lives of Latina migrants in London, and how, in the peculiarities of their experiences, the internet was domesticated. Their contexts were dynamic, and the inevitable changes in their day-to-day existence, in their experiences and in the opportunities encountered led their internet perceptions and appropriation. Although meanings would not be completely erased, neither were statics, which from a research perspective produce a great sense of uncertainty. Their legal status, their living conditions and the improvement or deterioration of their experience would affect how they related to technologies, providing new scope for research. For example, considering how predominant language was in this research, I wonder whether the role of the internet in these women's lives would have been different if they had spoken English. Furthermore it would have changed how they related to the community, the number and range of people they interacted with, and perhaps even the jobs they could apply for. Therefore, if their everyday lives had been improved by this particular factor, would the internet have been as crucial as it was in this case? This difference in context shows that investigating the role of technologies forces researchers to be constantly assessing the changes to come. Consequently it is not just new technological devices and developments that should feed new research in the field, but the changes in the composition of everyday realities as well as in social and cultural settings. Following Hartmann (2006), more research is also required on the symbolic context of appropriation and perhaps a clear methodology to grasp it, particularly when taking into account the internet in times of mobility which makes it even more difficult to deconstruct and analyse. Furthermore, in this thesis I have focused on Latina women in London, and although this specificity enabled me to address the richness of their experiences, it also constrained me in several respects. Therefore there are a multitude of angles that I have not addressed and that could contribute to the field of technological appropriation by migrant populations. For example, a study of Latino families, the dynamics of their interactions and the particularities of the role, in a rather patriarchal culture, might add new layers of complexity. Research could also be conducted on migrants from other countries, with established diasporas and with more extended social networks, and on how they negotiate from a more privileged position the role of the internet in their experiences. Moreover from a theoretical standpoint this could also constitute the first step towards researching other concepts such as imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) and internet mobility (Hartmann, 2013). The latter was discretely presented in my findings yet opens the door to research into how the internet can be appropriated in a different range of social spectrums and contexts.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Interview Topic guide[42]

1. Your stay in the UK

- For how long have you been in the UK?
- With whom did you come to England? (family: are they with you now?)
- How would you describe your life here?
- How it is in comparison to your home country?
- What are the positive aspects of this move?
- What are the low points?
- Do you feel disadvantaged here? Why?
- Language

2. Talk me through your average weekday

- How is it? What do you do? With whom do you relate? What kind of commitments you have?
- Do you make use of the Internet? Where?

3. With whom do you connect on a daily basis?

- Talk me about your closest friends in the city
- Do you have contact with non-Latin people?
- Do you belong to any organisation, community, etc.?

4. Family communications
- Where is your closest family?
- How do you get in contact with them?
- How did you arrive at this form of communication? Why?
- Tell me about the family member you contact the most
- How did you communicate before using the internet?
- Do you think the internet did/does/will change the way you communicate with your family?

5. Do you remember the first time you use a computer?
- Reasons
- Who helped you? Who taught you?
- Internet
- Role played by family members (particularly children)

[42] Translated version. The original topic guide was designed and conducted in Spanish.

- What do you do with the computer?

6. If you are taking computer/internet classes: how would you evaluate your experience?
- What did you like the most?
- What were the major challenges you encountered?
- Have you be on other courses before? (computer or otherwise) Why?
- How would you like to put into practice what you have learnt?
- Do you think you will continue using it?

7. What are technologies for you?
- How would you explain them to someone who doesn't know?
- In your own words, what is the Internet?

8. Do you consider yourself someone who likes computers or the internet?
- In your house, what technologies are most used? Who is the person who knows most?
- How are you in comparison to your friends?

9. Can you please tell me what you have being doing on the internet lately?
- Is this something you like to do?
- What else do you do on the internet?
- Would you describe your internet experience? Do you enjoy it? What bits do you find difficult or unpleasant?

10. Do you use the Internet in English or Spanish?
- Do you feel comfortable using it?
- What else would you like to learn?

11. Other media
- Do you have television at home? What programmess do you like to watch?
- Do you read newspapers? (on paper or online)

12. Perceptions
- Do you think that using technologies such as the internet has improved your life in any way? Why?
- In what sense has it not make your life better?
- Tell me more about the not so good side of technologies; do you have any personal experience?
- What is your general opinion regarding Internet use?
- According to you, what are the risks of being online?
- Do you think that the quality of your everyday life can be improved/decreased because of the usage of the Internet? How? Why?

**Personal data:**

Age:
Nationality:

Passport/citizenship:
Years outside her home country:
Other countries she has lived as an immigrant:
Marital status:
Children:
Flatmates:
Study:
Occupation:
Internet connection:
Computer at home:
Laptop:
Mobile phone:
Monthly or weekly income:

MEDIA@LSE
Department of Media and Communications

**Interviews: informed consent**

**Doctoral thesis 'Latin American Women and their use of new technologies'[43]**

By signing this document I freely accept to take part in this doctoral research about new technologies usage in everyday life, and to share my opinions, experiences and interactions following the invitation to be interviewed made by the researcher Mrs María Isabel Pavez Andonaegui.

My participation is on a voluntary basis. However at the end of the interview I will receive £10 in compensation for my time and contribution. I am free to abandon this research at any given time and without providing any reasons, though that will imply that I will not receive any economic incentive.

I accept that this interview will be taped for the sake of precision and later transcribed. These transcriptions will be for the exclusive use of the researcher who will keep my name confidential.

I accept that the totality of the results of this research will be reported in a doctoral thesis for the Media and Communications Department of the London School of Economics and Political Science, and also possibly in other academic publications.

Name:……

Signature:……..

Date:……..

[43] Provisional title

**Participant observation: informed consent**

**Doctoral thesis 'Latin American Women and their use of new technologies'[44]**

By signing this document I freely accept to take part in this doctoral research about new technologies usage in everyday life, and to share my opinions, experiences and interactions following the invitation to be interviewed made by the researcher Mrs. María Isabel Pavez Andonaegui.

My participation is on a voluntary basis. However at the end I will receive £10 in compensation for my time and contribution. I am free to abandon this research at any given time and without providing any reasons, though that will imply that I will not receive any economic incentive.

I understand that my participation includes accepting the presence of the researcher and that she observes my interactions with technologies, in my house or in any other public or private place. Furthermore that for the sake of precision these interactions will be recorded as handwritten notes. These notes will be for the exclusive use of the researcher who will keep my name confidential.

I accept that the totality of the results of this research will be reported in a doctoral thesis for the Media and Communications Department of the London School of Economics and Political Science, and also possibly in other academic publications.

Name:……..

Signature:……

Date: ……...

[44] Provisional title

## Appendix 3: Table of participants in greater detail

| Participant | Age | Country of birth | Marital Status | Children | Studies | Occupation | Income | Place to access the internet | Place of recruitment |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elisa | 28 | Ecuadorian | Married (Ecuadorian) | one - in Colombia | Didn't finish school | Occasional saleswoman | No income | Home | Gotitas de Sabor |
| Heidi | 28 | Peruvian | Married | one | Sociology (not finished) | Nursery-Kitchen | £800 | Home - Cybercafé | Through someone working at Irmo |
| Fabiola | 31 | Bolivian | Married | two - one in the UK | Primary school | Cleaner | £800 | Home (Ipod) | Student hall |
| Daniela | 32 | Colombian | Divorced | one | Childcare | Student | Don't know | At home | Daughter of one participant |
| Diane | 32 | Colombian | Single | two - one in Spain | Odontology | Cleaner | £700 | Home/ Mobile | University building |
| Vivian | 32 | Colombian | Partner (in Colombia) | one - in Colombia | Management studies | Student + cleaner | £700 | Home and blackberry | Friend attending to beginners English classes |
| Constanza | 34 | Bolivian | Married | two - one in Spain | Psychology | Carer | £1,000 | Home / Work | Friend of one participant |
| Andrea | 34 | Bolivian | Partner | one | Primary school | Cleaner | £1,000 | Home and bus (Ipod) | Student hall |
| Milena | 35 | Peruvian | Married | two | Journalist / Tv producer | Cleaner | £355 | Home | Friend of one participant |
| Nieves | 35 | Colombian | Single | No | Public Policy | Cleaner | £1,200 | Home | Friend of one participant |
| Amalia | 38 | Bolivian | Divorced | one | Hairdressing course | Hairdresser | £600 | Yes | Friend of one participant |
| Antonia | 38 | Ecuadorian | Married | two | Secondary school | Cleaner | £620 | Home | Survey at playgroup in Irmo |
| Cindy | 39 | Bolivian | Divorced | two | Primary school | Cleaner | £456 | Cybercafé - Home | Through someone working at Irmo |
| Mirentxu | 39 | Bolivian | Single | No | Secondary school | Cleaner | £514 | Work | University building |
| Valeria | 40 | Colombian | Divorced | Two - one in Colombia | Management studies | Cleaner - Kitchen | £1,000 | Home | Someone working at Carila |
| Marta | 40 | Chilean | Married | One | Secondary school | Cleaner | £600 | Community centre | Casa Latina |
| Francisca | 41 | Colombian | Married | three - in Spain | Primary school | Cleaner | £800 | Cybercafé | Through someone working at Irmo |
| Berta | 42 | Bolivian | Married' (English husband) | No | Biologist - Former PhD student | Student + nursery + kitchen assistant | £300 | Home, Public Library, Community centre | Casa Latina |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sara | 42 | Ecuadorian | Divorced | One | Teacher | Unemployed | £440 | Home | Friend of one participant |
| Carolina | 43 | Colombian | Divorced | two - one in Spain | Teacher | Unemployed | £260 | Home | Survey at playgroup in Irmo |
| Bernardita | 45 | Colombian | Divorced | One | Childcare (unfinished) | Cleaner | £400 | Home | |
| Victoria | 46 | Colombian | Married | one - in Colombia | | Cleaner | £1,200 | Home | Friend of one participant |
| Nidia | 55 | Colombian | Divorced | one | Secondary school | Retired | Won't say | Community centre, home and Ipod | Casa Latina |
| Juana | 56 | Colombian | Divorced | two - one in Colombia | Accountant | Cleaner | £900 | Cybercafé - Son's place | University building |
| Loreto | 57 | Colombian | Married | Two - one in Spain | Didn't finish school | Unemployed | £400 | Community Centre | Casa Latina |
| Patricia | 63 | Colombian | Widow | two - one in Spain | Secondary school | Retired-Benefits | £528 | Home and Community Centre | Irmo |
| Julia | 63 | Colombian | Widow | one in Spain | Didn't finish school | Retired-Benefits | £528 | Home and Community Centre | Irmo |
| Eli | 64 | Colombian | Widow | three | Primary school | Retired-Benefits | £490 | House, community centre | Casa Latina |
| Lorena | 64 | Colombian | Divorced | three | Secondary school | Cleaner | £650 | Community centre | Casa Latina |
| Macarena | 65 | Peruvian | Married (husband in Peru) | two - in Peru | Didn't finish school | Cleaner (+ pension) | £500 | Community centre | Casa Latina |
| Natalia | 65 | Colombian | Widow | Five - in Colombia | Primary school | Retired-Benefits | £540 | Community centre and Blackberry | Casa Latina |
| Mónica | 67 | Colombian | Divorced | two - one in Spain | Secondary school | Cleaner | £200 | Community centre and Blackberry | Casa Latina |
| Paula | 68 | Colombian | Single | one | Didn't finish school | Retired-Benefits | £520 | Community Centre | Casa Latina |
| Denise | 68 | Colombian | Single | None | Didn't finish school | Cleaner | £430 | Community centre and Cybercafé | Casa Latina |
| Elena | 76 | Colombian | Divorced | three | Secretary | Retired-Benefits | £520 | House | Friend of one participant |
| Leticia | 83 | Colombian | Widow | two | Didn't finish | Retired-Benefits | £490 | House and Community Centre | Casa Latina |
| Vania | 85 | Colombian | Widow | three | Former mayor | Retired-Benefits | £520 | House and Community Centre | Casa Latina |

Appendix 4: Example of booklet used for classes



# Beginning to use the Internet

**learndirect** *IT1: Electronic Communication* guides you through the early stages of using the Internet to find and use web pages and to use email. It breaks down the skills you need into easy stages and gives you plenty of opportunities to practise, build your skills and consolidate your learning.

For this course you need to use a web browser such as Microsoft Internet Explorer 5 or a later version, and either an email program such as Microsoft Outlook Express or a web-based email service.

A web browser lets you look at, save and print web pages and store the addresses of pages that you may want to look at again. An email program, whether on your own computer or on a web page, lets you write and send email messages and receive email messages from other people. You can keep an 'address book' with the email addresses of people you want to keep in contact with, and manage your email messages in folders.

## Working with the Internet

There are two types of task that you will need to carry out using the Internet:

- using the World Wide Web to find information
- using email software to send, receive and manage email messages.

There are many web browsers, but those that are most commonly used are Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator or Communicator. Whichever web browser you use, make sure that you have the most up-to-date version. You can get the newest version from the Internet for free. If you don't have the latest version, you may find that there are some web pages you can't use properly.

To send email, you can either use a program on your computer, such as Microsoft Outlook or Outlook Express, or you can use a web-based email service. A web-based email service lets you write, receive and manage your email from a web page. You will still be able to copy any messages or files that you are sent to your own computer's hard disk, but you don't need to have special software for your email; you just use your web browser.

If you do want to use an email program on your computer, you will need to set it up to work with your email account. Most programs have instructions that are easy to follow, or a 'wizard' to help you set up your email account. When you choose a program to work with email, think about what you want to be able to do.

## Follow a link

### How to do it

Move the mouse pointer over a link – such as 'holidays'. The pointer changes shape to a hand with a pointing finger. Whenever you see this symbol, the pointer is over a link. It may be linked text, or a button or picture with a link.

Click on the link. A new page replaces the page you were looking at:

Click on **find out more about our holidays** to move on to another page.

### A bit more detail

When you use the World Wide Web you will follow links all the time to move from one page to another.

It may sometimes take a moment or so for the new page to appear. There are several reasons for this, but the most common is that it's a complicated page that has a lot of pictures and other information that takes a while for your computer to receive and process.

Once you have followed a link you can then use ***Back*** on the toolbar to go back to the page you just came from. And after you have gone back, you can use ***Forward*** to retrace your steps. You can use ***Back*** repeatedly to go through a long sequence of pages you have looked at.

## Use the Back and Forward buttons to retrace your steps

### How to do it

Click on the ***Back*** button to get back from the page you are looking at to the 'holidays' page.

Follow the link to **find out about fund-raising events**.

Now use ***Back*** to go backwards, and ***Forward*** to get back to here.

# The opening screen

Your screen will look like this:

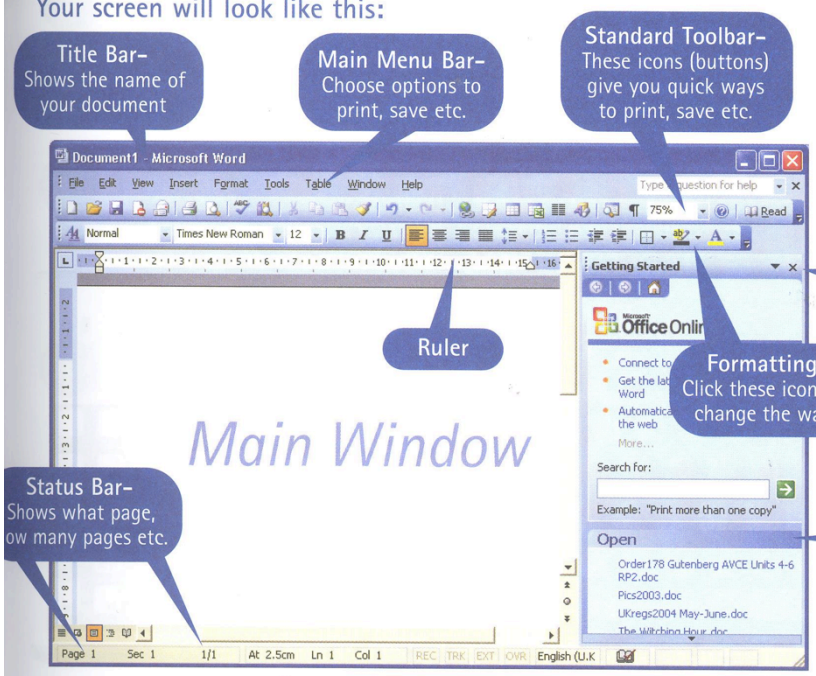



*Figure 1.1: The opening screen*

The **Title Bar** shows the name of your document, which might be, for example, a story or letter. If you have not given it a name yet, it will say 'Document1' or perhaps 'Document2' if this is your second story since you started **Microsoft Word** in this chapter.

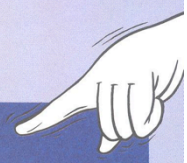
The **Main Menu** has lots of options for you to choose from. You'll be using it when you need to print or save your story.

The **Standard Toolbar** has a number of **buttons** with little pictures called **icons** which are sometimes clicked instead of choosing from the main menu.

**The Formatting Toolbar** has icons which let you change the way your text looks – for example, making the letters bigger or smaller.

The area of the screen where you type is called the **main window**.

The **Status Bar** shows what page you are on and how many pages there are in the document – for example 3/6 means you are looking at page 3 of a 6-page document. It also shows a lot of other things which you don't need to know about at this stage.



**Tip:**

If you are using Word 2000 you will not see the Task pane on the right of the screen.

**Note:**

The Task pane is new in Word 2002. It lists the documents you have recently opened, and other options. Close it now by clicking on the X at the top of the pane.

# The keyboard

## Your keyboard will look like this:

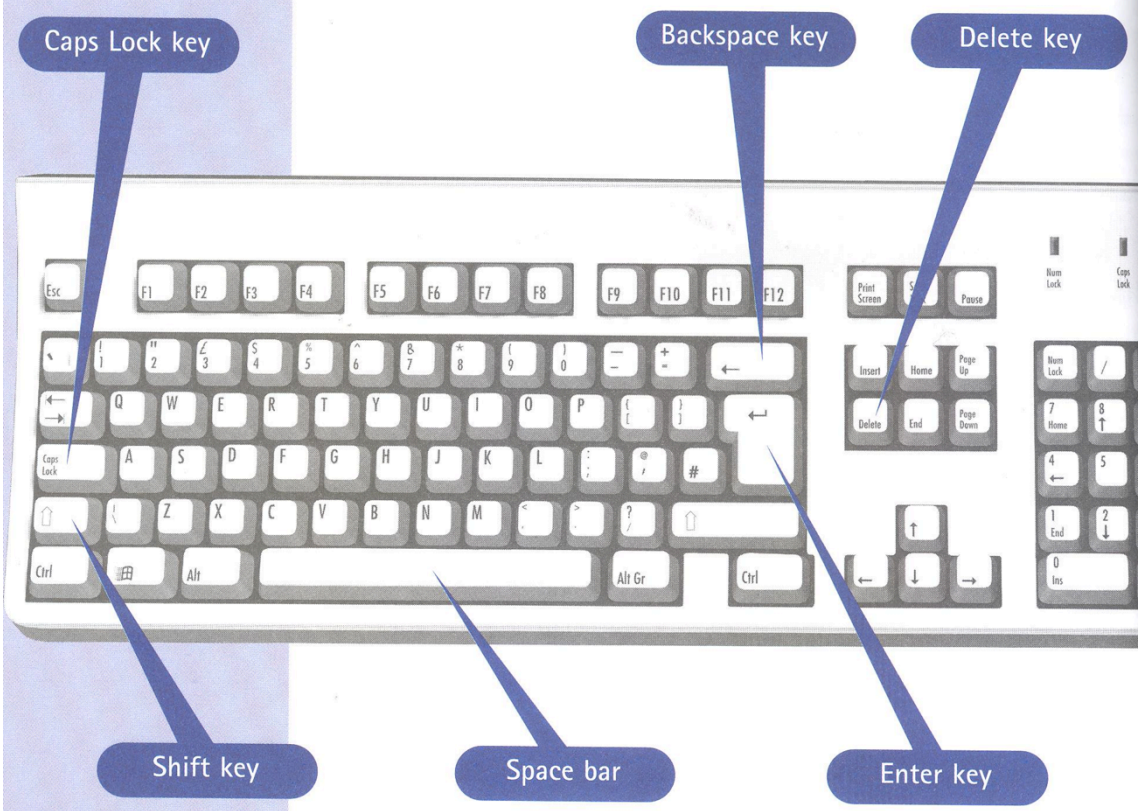



*Figure 1.2: The Keyboard*